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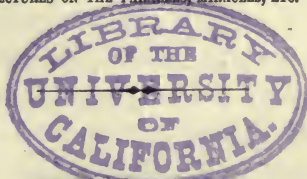
OR, LESSONS

CHIEFLY FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH.

BY THE

REV. JOHN CUMMING, D.D.,

MINISTER OF THE SCOTCH NATIONAL CHURCH, AUTHOR OF APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES,
LECTURES ON THE PARABLES, MIRACLES, ETC.



PHILADELPHIA:

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PREFACE.

IN no preceding volume have I been able to unfold the very suggestive, beautiful, and popular incidents of the life of Joseph. His biography is given at length by the sacred penmen. It is full of interest, rich in useful lessons, and calculated to instruct and edify old and young.

If I be spared in health, I should like to publish my remaining Lectures on the character and incidents developed in the march of Israel from Egypt into the promised land—so full of startling phenomena, expressive types, and suggestive lessons, under the title of “The Church in the Desert.”

Meantime, may a blessing go with this exposition of a great and good life—a life so superior to that of ordinary Christians, too frequently glorified by human biographers with a splendour

disproportionate or not their own. Goethe says, "This is the prerogative of the noblest natures, that their departure to higher regions exercises a no less blessed influence than did their abode on earth—that they lighten us from above like stars by which to steer our course, often interrupted by storms."

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THE

LAST OF THE PATRIARCHS.

CHAPTER I.

JOSEPH A PAGE OF PROVIDENCE.

“For envy doth invade
Works breathing to eternity, and cast
Upon the fairest piece the greatest shade.”

“And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions.”—Acts vii. 9, 10.

THE Jews had much to be thankful for, much to be humble at, but nothing that of and in themselves they could glory in. All the glory that shone upon their nation was from God; all the sins that defiled it were from themselves. It is a painful and humbling recollection that the twelve patriarchs—or rather the eleven—the founders of a great Christian economy, were stained by a dark sin. It is a no less painful fact that the twelve Apostles—the founders of the new Christian economy—were not without faults, and sins, and failings. But perhaps

all this is designed to show that, in order to build securely for eternity, we must dig deeper than the twelve foundations of the Apostles, and build only upon the spotless and perfect Rock of ages, the chief corner and foundation-stone.

These records of the sins of the founders of their nation are, indirectly, strong presumptions that Moses wrote as he was guided by the Holy Spirit of God. A Jew was proud of his people; everything that could magnify them he put in the brightest light; everything that would shame he depressed, and placed darker and deeper in the shadow. If Moses, a Jew as we may call him, with all the partialities, the patriotism, and the pride of a Jew, had been writing after his own taste, and according to the dictates of his own fancy, he would have put the excellences of the patriarchs in prominent and brilliant relief, and he would have toned down and shaded off their defects so skilfully, that we should have been scarcely able to detect them. This is the conduct of human writers, and the character of ordinary sketches of human heroes; and the fact that Moses describes with impartiality alike the faults and the virtues of the founders of his nation, is a proof that he wrote by the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Let us recollect, however, that whatever were the sins of the men, they had no countenance in the creeds that they subscribed, or from the God whom they professed to serve. Every patriarch's creed condemned every patriarch's sin. Their sins were in spite of their religion; their virtues and their ex-

cellences were its natural and its spontaneous growth. All the sins of Joseph's brethren are to be traced to the common fall; all the excellences of Joseph, and the relieving virtues of Joseph's brethren, are to be traced to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The treatment of Joseph, as recorded in his painful and so for melancholy history, is carried by the pen of inspiration to its true source—"moved with envy." In other words, the sins of Joseph's brethren are attributed to their fountain, the heart. All evils are traceable to that spring: "Out of the heart," says Joseph's Saviour, "proceed adulteries," and the long, black catalogue of crimes that stain and deform humanity. "As a man thinketh," says another inspired penman, "so is he:" he is not always what he looks, but what he thinks. He may disguise for a season the real man, as far as the outward eye can see; but the inward heart is just as bare and naked to God as are the branches of the tree amid the frosts of winter to the outward eye, when all the foliage of circumstance and of summer has been swept away. The roots of life are in the heart; the fruits are the actions. The fountain is the heart, deeds are the rivulets, coloured by the channels of outward circumstances, but still unaltered; and onward they will flow till the fountain is stopped up for ever and for ever. Some one has said there is electricity enough in a drop of water to launch the thunderbolt, to charge the cloud, and to lighten the whole sky, if it could be disengaged. There is depravity enough in the human heart, left

to itself, to turn Eden into hell, and the garden of the Lord into the bleakest desert. It is not our guess, it is God's assertion—"The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Hence the sacred penman traces the bad conduct of the patriarchs to the inner passion cherished in their hearts—envy.

This teaches us a very important lesson. To correct a wrong life, we must first correct a wrong heart. To lop off an outward act is so far good. For instance, if by a prohibitory principle you can make a drunkard sober, you have done so much good; but you must not suppose that you have made any inroad by that process upon the inner spring of drunkenness, that is, the heart. In disease, an unskilful physician will attempt to heal by applying an outward remedy to one part, but it will afterwards break out at another. The inner corruption of the heart breaks out in one man in one way, and in another man in another way; if you stop up one outlet, so far you have done good, but we shall generally find that unless the inward spring is sweetened by the branch of life being cast into it, the inner corruption will work itself out more formidably in another direction. The way to correct a wrong life is to have corrected the wrong heart. The fountain must be made pure, and its streams will be so; the tree must be made good, and its foliage and its fruit will be so. The external pruning may go on, but the internal revolution must be sought before any real, permanent, or glorious outward change can be achieved. The blow

that is to be felt at the utmost circumference must be struck at the centre.

This can only be done by the Maker of the house descending into it, and driving out the venomous reptiles that have found retreats amid its once glorious chambers, and them that sell doves, and the money-changers, who are polluting by their presence the once holy chancel of poor humanity. God alone can change the heart, and to God alone we must first look for that mighty transformation.

But while holding and asserting this, let us not forget that we are responsible to God, and that we shall be found responsible before man, for what is in the heart. We are responsible to God for all the heart is, and it is our own entire and exclusive fault, if the heart is not changed by grace from what it is by nature. But, you ask, who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? When we have told a man what must be done by the grace of God to make him a new creature, and when he asks earnestly and truly, "How is it possible I can do this when God alone can do it?" we see in him the best fore-sign that the work is about to be done. A deep sense of our ruin is the preface to our regeneration. What a man feels most sorrowfully is just what he will pray most earnestly to be delivered from. If you have come to that point where you are asking with anxiety irrepressible how this is to be done, it is evidence that you feel the burden, and that you are groping for Him who can remove it, and invest you with that freedom wherewith Christ makes his people free.

And while it is God that does this in answer to prayer, we must never forget that what He gives is essential to holiness of life upon earth, and to an entrance into heaven hereafter. We are born into this world fit for this world; we need to be born again for the world that is to be. Our first birth is our preparation for breathing upon this earth, gravitating towards its centre, hearing its sounds, and seeing its sights; our second birth is equally essential for our breathing the air, and basking in the sunshine of the blessed. An unregenerate heart could not beat ten minutes amid the splendours of the glorified. The old and corrupt tree will not grow in Eden's virgin soil; its leaves will not wave in the Eden air; its fruit will not ripen in Eden suns. It is true now, as it was when Nicodemus heard it for the first time—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." We need a change of heart, that there may be a change of life; a purity of heart, that there may be a fitness for the kingdom of heaven.

But whilst divine sovereignty must achieve that mighty transformation, let us not forget that man, as a rational and reponsible being, may do much to keep down vain and sinful thoughts within him. When God changes the human heart, he does not make man perfect; it would be heaven, and not earth, if it were so. If we read the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, we shall hear the sainted Apostle describing a law in his members warring with the law in his spirit: so now the greatest Christian finds it his greatest grief that thoughts rise

in his bosom he knows not how, and that feelings creep around his heart he sees not whence; and he would give the whole world if he could get rid of these, which are his greatest grief, and in the sight of God his greatest shame. And whilst the Holy Spirit is prayed for as the only sovereign transformer of the heart, and he changes it, we may not then cease to act, to pray, to watch, but we must give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. A believer may, and ought to have recourse to many reasonable means for the maintenance of the holy and the good within him; and one of the best is, to dislodge the evil thought when he is conscious of it, by drawing into contact with it a holy and a divine one. The lesser light is always best quenched by the higher; the unholy appetite is best dislodged by the approach of a holy one. When, therefore, evil thoughts come into your minds, and unholy passions raven for prey, which, if left to themselves, will grow up in strength, till from being suppliants for hospitality, they become tyrants, dominating over you — when such feelings come into your heart, one of the best means, next to prayer, of dislodging them is, turning the current of your thoughts upon some holy subject. Think of the lost and dear ones that have preceded you to glory; think of your afflictions; think of your mercies; think, “Thou, God, seest me;” think of Gethsemane, of Calvary, of the cross — of death, and judgment, and eternity; and the strong current

of these grand and awful thoughts, rushing through the channels of the soul, will sweep before it the evil passions that nestle and seek nutriment within it; and, by God's grace, you will be more than conqueror through Him who loved you.

Another prescription which Joseph's brethren ought to have pursued, was, to separate from each other. Not only should they have nipped the evil passion of envy in the bud, but they ought to have parted from each other. We find that men will generally do in a crowd what they would not dare to do individually. It has been said that a corporation has no conscience. Things beyond doubt are done by them in their corporate capacity that they would not dare to do as individuals responsible to God, to society, and to mankind; and hence we find that whilst associations are often the means of strengthening the good, they are no less frequently the nurseries for strengthening the bad. If these patriarchs had only separated from each other, their passions might have cooled down; by keeping together, discussing their grievances, speaking of Joseph's pride, presumption, and folly, they nursed their passions to that pitch that they were prepared to imbrue their hands in a brother's blood, and only by subsequent and cooler reflections did they consent to sell him — an alternative scarcely less cruel — a slave to the Midianite merchants.

But, let us ask, what awoke this evil passion in his brethren towards Joseph? First, it was the admonition that Joseph gave them. He had complained to their father of their conduct. It needs,

as we all well know, no less grace from God to take good advice than to give it; and one of the best evidences of a Christian man is, that he has grace to take good advice when given him. But when a younger or an inferior gives the older advice, how difficult to bear! It seems as if he assumed great wisdom, and attributed to ourselves great folly. It therefore needs great grace to take good advice from one who is younger in age or inferior in circumstance to ourselves; and yet the rational and Christian course is to welcome good counsel from whatever quarter, and to estimate it, not by the circumstance of the counsellor, but by its own intrinsic worth.

They may have treated him ill also on account of Jacob's fondness for him; but to treat Joseph ill because Jacob loved him well, was not to punish Jacob, but to punish Joseph: they made Joseph bear the punishment, instead of him for whom it was meant. Joseph perhaps was in some degree at fault. He was somewhat too ready to state his excellences; he need not have been so forward to mention his dreams. If he had been commanded by God to do so, there could have been no choice; but if he did so to show how excellent or superior he was, he needlessly and sinfully provoked the envy and jealousy of his brethren. Many a good Christian attributes to the cross of Christ troubles and afflictions that ought to be attributed to his own infirmity and indiscretion. The cross of Christ is heavy enough, but we need not make it heavier by the results of our own imprudence; and in God's sight many things that we think to be the offence of the



cross, may, when analysed and fairly set before us, be seen to be the results of our own sinful, inconsistent, or indiscreet conduct. It may not have been wholly because Joseph was so excellent that he was so persecuted; it may have been in some degree that, excellent as he was, he was guilty of indiscretions that he ought to have avoided.

But there is no doubt that much of the persecution he met with was on account of his superior character. It is the law of this life that all excellence is envied; and the higher men rise in this world, in any sphere, the deeper and the broader is the shadow of envy that is projected around them. We cannot be Christians without paying the penalty. A Christian cannot pass through this world, to use the language of the road, toll free; he must suffer because he is a Christian. Through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The especial passion that was felt towards Joseph was, as we have seen, the passion of envy, which is really and truly the most irrational, the most absurd, one might almost add, the most criminal of all passions. For what is envy? It is not a fair and proper ambition to better oneself—which is legitimate enough—but a malicious and malignant desire to destroy the prosperity of one's neighbour. It is not complaining that we are so low, but it is being exasperated because a brother is so successful. My next-door neighbour, as a tradesman, is very prosperous, and I am far behind him. Now what should that inspire? Not envy at his prosperity, but deter-

miuation, by the grace of God, to exert myself more and succeed better. The passion of envy is not a desire to elevate oneself, but to exterminate and depress one's brother; and surely if there be a passion that can be called demoniacal, and the inspiration of Satan, it is envy. A brother's prosperity should make us thankful, our own adversity should make us humble; and neither in the one case nor the other should an emotion be felt that would take one drop from the overflowing cup, or stop a beat in the bounding heart, of one who is more prosperous and happy than we are. We should see that it is God who raises up and lays low; and we should examine whether the prosperity of a brother be not on account of his superior industry, and our own adversity in consequence of our own mismanagement, indolence, or imprudence.

Let us never think of moral evil in the heart as insignificant. It begins first as a very trivial thing, but it grows by indulgence till it becomes very powerful. The first emotion of jealousy or uncharitableness may be easily crushed; but, when cherished, it seems to fix its grasp more firmly, till, instead of our having control over it, we are moved by it, and carried headlong as Satan, its author, may lead, seduce, or guide us. Crush the reptile in its egg; ask, not only that God would change the heart, but that he would deliver you from evil, and lead you not into temptation; and more and more admire the wonderful wisdom by which He spake who said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say

unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whomsoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Anger is not a sin. It is a great mistake to think a person who becomes angry necessarily sins. The sin of anger is created in its continuance—"Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath." It is said of Jesus, "He was angry," but it is added, "being grieved at the hardness of their hearts." What a trait is that! What an evidence that there was there more than the human, that there was indeed the Divine Himself. "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." "Agree with thine adversary quickly." Make up the quarrel as soon as you can; you know not where it will end. All feelings of anger, wrath, jealousy, envy, uncharitableness, and hatred, should, if possible, be nipped in their commencement. And when we think of the greatest sinner against us, how much there is to pity and to forgive in him, how much is in ourselves worse than we see in him, we shall learn to be angry—for that we cannot help—but to be more grieved at sin than irritated against a brother. When we find a great sinner, our first emotion is to condemn him, and perhaps so far this is right; but we should remember that if we had

been in the same circumstances, exposed to the same trials, forsaken early in the same way, we might perhaps have done worse. The more we become acquainted with man, the more we feel it is our province to bow at the throne of grace in prayers for mercy; that it is God's prerogative alone to ascend the judgment throne, and pronounce righteous and well-merited retribution.

It is added by the sacred writer, after stating the sins of his brethren against Joseph, and tracing all these sins to their proper fountain, namely, the heart, that "God was with him." His brethren were against him, but, in the language of Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, "God was with him." As we study his interesting biography, we shall see this most strikingly exhibited. We shall see man against him, woman against him, Satan against him, powers and principalities against him; but we shall see, by unmistakeable marks, that "God was with him," and therefore the victory was his. His brethren cruelly persecuted him; but their conduct was overruled by God to be mercy to themselves and elevation to Joseph. Their very wrath aided them. If they had not done as they did, the elevation of Joseph, which was their safety, would not have been accomplished. They sold him to the Midianite merchants, in order to prevent the realization of his dream; and that very sale was overruled by God to his elevation to the right hand of Pharaoh, and to the administration of all the treasures of Egypt.

If God be with us, who can be against us? Is

the wisdom of the wise against us? God will make it foolishness. Is the strength of the powerful against us? God will make it weakness. Take a large and impartial retrospect of the world's history, and you will find that even in the tangled skein of this world's providential arrangements, right is might, the highest principle is ever the truest policy.

We learn the lesson that "all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." Everything, apparently, at this stage of Joseph's biography was working for evil to him; but when enabled to take a retrospect of the whole of his life, we find that everything was working for good to him; and Joseph found what we know, that if our faces are set in the right direction, all things fall into beautiful order. Things are not only quiescent and unobtrusive, but we learn that all things are active—they *work*; and not only active, but harmoniously active—they *work together*; and not only harmoniously active, but beneficently active—they work together *for good* to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. Holy hands will help God's people, heavenly light will shine upon their steps, an Almighty shield will be over them; they will find that each is immortal till he has finished the mission that God has assigned him to do.

No difficulties at the beginning of a right course must ever make us draw back from it. Never yet was a true path taken that did not meet with violent obstructions at its commencement. Let us remember that Satan is not yet an exile from earth; and

wherever he sees a course whose consequences he can calculate to be glory to God and good to mankind, he will stir earth and hell to obstruct it. When Jesus came into the world, his own, we are told, received him not. The approach of the holy and the true provokes the envy and jealousy of the bad. The tree that strikes its roots the deepest, and bears the richest blossom, and the most fragrant and sweetly-flavoured fruit, needs to be watered with the tears of weeping eyes, and its soil to be moistened with the blood of warm hearts; while the very efforts that are made to destroy it are the measure of its excellence, its perpetuity, and its progress. Look not behind you for encouragements, but look upward. Do not count the heads, nor weigh the acclamations of those that are about you, but think of the principle that sustains you, and of Him who is the spectator of the race that you are engaged in.

How ignorant are we of what is to be the issue, and what is the part that we are now playing in the providence of God! There is not an individual reader of this page that could be missed at this moment. The humblest dweller in the garret is just as needful for the accomplishment of God's purpose, as the great and noble lady who sits upon the throne. Each should have a conviction that, in God's sight and for God's purposes, he is of importance. True, we do not clearly see or know how. But when we think how little we do know of anything, we have reason to be humble. I know the next street; I know the hedge in which the first violet emits its

fragrance when the winter is over; but I do not know whether I am at the outside of the universe, or in its centre; I do not know what the stars are, or what is my relation to them. I know no more of the vast and boundless universe that is around me, and of the harmony and connection of all things, than does the little insect in the cup of a flower in the garden, of the doings of the family close by. And when we think how little we understand, how humble should we be! Blessed thought! that though we know not what God is doing now, we shall know hereafter; that though we cannot understand what his purposes respecting us are now, we are assured of this, that all things work for good to them that love him, and that the end and issue shall be glory to himself and happiness to mankind.

Let us devoutly study the Scriptures; let us thank God that they were written for our learning. It is a delightful thought, that patriarchs lived for us; that they envied Joseph for us; that Joseph suffered for us. Whatsoever was done and said four thousand years ago is impressing its influence at this moment upon all our hearts: and there is not a child upon its mother's knee, nor a babe in its first cradle, that is not influenced by this, that "the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him."

Let us pray that God would give us his Holy Spirit, that we may have Joseph's faith, his fixity of principle, his fervour of love, and may be delivered from all pride and vain glory—from all envy, malice, and hatred, and all uncharitableness, for Christ's sake.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONQUERING THOUGHT.

“Divine authority within man’s breast
Brings every thought, word, action, to the test;
Warns him or prompts, approves him or restrains,
As reason or as passion takes the reins;
Heaven from above, and conscience from within,
Cries in his startled ear, Abstain from sin.”

“How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”—
GEN. xxxix. 9.

JOSEPH was perfectly satisfied, from previous instruction, that notwithstanding all its present roughness and difficulties, the way of piety, of purity, and of truth, is the path to prosperity and greatness, even in this world. Sometimes his faith might falter, and his hopes give way, when he met with trials where he expected deliverance, and beheld the gloom grow darker when he had reason to anticipate the approach of dawn; when his trials multiplied with his promotion, and he found the highest places most slippery. He may have been tempted at times to indulge the all but atheistic feeling, “God hath forgotten me. My God hath forsaken me. Doth God see? Doth God hear?” And yet he must have recollected what the Psalmist has subsequently embodied, “He that made the eye, shall he not see? He that formed the ear, shall he

not hear? He that judgeth righteously, shall he not avenge?"

The exclamation of the patriarch is the feeling of a Christian when tempted to commit sin. Whatever command in the Decalogue we are tempted to break, the right and most powerful restraint is, "How shall I do this wickedness, that crime, and by doing so sin against God?"

The offence, whatever it may be, may be one not denounced by mankind. In Egypt there were crimes that were unhappily popular; but the Egyptian had an excuse that the Hebrew had not. The Egyptian knew not the ten commandments; the Hebrew did. Though Sinai was not yet visible, nor the Decalogue yet written, the Hebrew knew what were the will and the commandments of God. Joseph might have pleaded for the crime that he was tempted to commit what indeed is still pleaded, "Let us do in Egypt what the Egyptians do," as we hear people say now, "Do in Rome what Rome does." If this applies to forms, ceremonies, and indifferent things, it is right. A person should not be singular, if singularity can be avoided consistently with principle and duty. But if it relate to essential and everlasting truth, or to those moralities that are clearly enunciated in the Decalogue, and are the pillars and props of our social prosperity, then to "Do in Rome as Rome does," is simply to accept the infidel's creed, and follow the sensualist's and the profligate's practice. Such a principle as this goes with the world; and, unlike the principles of Christianity, in no respect against it. The adoption

of such a maxim must ever lower; it can never elevate. It would make religion a thing of place, morality a practice of convenience, and a man's creed a rule of life contingent on the degree of latitude he lives in, the climate of which he is a native, and the barbarism or civilization that may characterise the country in which his lot is temporarily or permanently cast. But if we understand real religion in its flower and its fruitage, pure morality, it blossoms in all climes, as it may be planted in all soils. It is the grand and distinguishing peculiarity of the religion of Jesus, that it is fit for all people, and kindreds, and tribes, and tongues, touching and transforming the heart, and thereby purifying, elevating, and ennobling the whole outer deportment of man.

It might have been pleaded by Joseph what may be pleaded for other crimes and offences in other countries, that to comply with the will of superiors — whatever that will may be — is the sure way to prosperity and success in the world; or, to bring this theory into a lower sphere, there is no getting on in business without a little dishonesty. One will say, "There is no making a fortune speedily enough without a little giving and taking. True, God's law condemns it; true, the Bible is against it; but still we must get on." Now it is not necessary that we should be rich; it is necessary that we should be Christians. It is not essential that we should prosper in the world — it may be detrimental to us; but it is essential in the sight of God, and in the calm, solemn, and deliberate judg-

ment of our own consciences, that we should do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God. The place where a wicked man looks least is his own conscience. No man looks so little to himself as he who knows his life will not bear a moment's reflection. In all our thoughts, and words, and doings, there is enough of evil; but where the life is flagrantly corrupt, where offences are deliberately indulged in, man loses respect for himself; he tries to get rid of the sense and *surveillance* of an omnipresent God, and he hides himself from God, as he degrades himself before his own conscience. But we may depend upon it, the way to get on is to do what is right. The path of principle may not appear the nearest to a given result, but it invariably is so. Principle is always expedient; what seems expedient is not always so. Do what is right, and heaven and earth will justify you; do what is wrong, and there is enough of a sense of real morality in the world to make one feel that all voices around us will be reprobating and condemning ones. The path that seems to lead directly to prosperity before the eye, when prejudiced by passion, has been proved in a thousand instances to precipitate him who walks in it into death, despair, and judgment; whereas the path that appears rugged at the first, unpopular in the acceptance of mankind, but justified in that Book with whose prescriptions it runs parallel, in the long run will either conduct you to prosperity in this world, or, if it lead you to a prison as it did Joseph, it will kindle a sunshine within that will irradiate that prison with more than

the splendours of a palace, and make the righteous prisoner feel noble in the presence of the unrighteous kings and the princes of the earth.

It may be argued by some placed in circumstances of temptation to the breach of the seventh commandment of the Decalogue, that God has implanted in our nature certain passions, instincts, and desires, and that therefore it cannot be wrong to indulge them. There are certain passions that neither in their root, nor in their fruit, are of God; the seeds of which were sown, not by God's hand, but by the devil's; the nutriment of which is not the soil of Eden, but of death. There are other passions, appetites, and desires, implanted by God, which are holy, beautiful, and good, provided they are developed in the channels that God has assigned them. There are some passions that are not to be attributed to God, but exclusively to the devil; there are other passions, appetites, and desires, in human nature, which are not sinful, but holy, which were in Paradise before sin blasted it, and are not condemned in the Word of God; but these are and continue holy, just, and beautiful, only while limited by the laws, confined to the channels, and developed in the spheres which God in his Holy Word has assigned. And, therefore, if any one says, I must indulge passions because God has implanted them, that person, by recognising God as the giver of the passion, must also in consistency recognise God as assigning the limit and the law to the exercise of that passion. Whenever, therefore, any one says (and the infidel is very fond of that aphorism, the

thoughtless profligate is also fond of it) God implanted this passion, therefore it must be always right to indulge it, remember that the recognition of God as the giver of the passion, must by fair reasoning involve such person in the recognition of God as the legislator and regulator of the passion. If you will, therefore, give God the praise or the authorship of that passion, you must take from God the orbit in which it is to move, the channel in which the appetite is to run. It is only holy, just, and good, when you take God's law to regulate that which you ascribe to God's power for origin, authority, and impulse.

In speaking of restraint from sin, whatever sins you may be tempted to — and every one has some besetting sin, or rather some sin more predominant in his nature than another—it is right to state there is no sin for which God's grace is not sufficient, just as there is no sin for which there is not now pardon and forgiveness. What are some of the restraints that have been proposed for sin by mankind? Some have proposed a fear of consequences. So far this is good; sin ever has following it a blighting shadow. The consequences of sin are frequently delineated in the Word of God as dissuaves against it. Its most beautiful cup is the syren's cup — it has poison in it; its most brilliant promises only conceal the deadly issues they embosom. It may be a very fair, a very just, and in many cases a very powerful dissuasive against sin, that it will lead to disastrous consequences in the world that now is, and that it will involve, if unfor-

given and unabjured, everlasting misery in the world to come. But when man's passion gets the lead, and his conscience, reason, and Bible, are left behind, how overwhelming does the force and impetus of evil become! till the little stream that might have been checked at its fountain, swells into the impetuous and resistless torrent that sweeps soul and body into the depths of everlasting perdition.

Another proposed restraint from sin, is natural conscience. This is a very powerful restraint in many a case, because, while it is true that man has fallen, and that every faculty is corrupted, yet in the worst of men there are traces and stirrings in the conscience, the remains of its aboriginal author, legislator, and law; and in silent, solitary, and sequestered hours, the conscience that has been long stupified, or, if not stupified, diverted from its work by the amusements, the pleasures, and the fascinations of the world, will begin to awaken within its own province, and in the heart of its possessor, forebodings of death, and judgment, and eternity, too terrible and overwhelming for one to bear. But very often conscience comes in too late. The general law in the natural and unconverted man is, that conscience does not warn so strongly before the sin, as it accuses and reproaches after the sin. When the passions are in full play, and the spark from beneath falling into them kindles them into an intense flame, conscience is trodden under foot, its still small voice is hushed amidst the thunders and the noise of conflicting elements and impulses;

and the passions, claiming a monopoly of the man, carry all before them, while the conscience bows down prostrate and is overwhelmed. After satiety has come by indulgence, the conscience begins to recover its depressed might, and to reason of the crime that has been done, and of the consequences that must follow; but this is too late to avert the crime—it is only the accusation that stings the criminal after the crime has been perpetrated.

Another proposed restraint from sin is a sense of honour. One rejoices that there should be such a feeling. There are, even amongst natural men, honourable spirits—persons who, though not Christians, would not do a mean, dishonest, or paltry thing; and we admire such traces of man's first greatness and glory. But we find that even in those men, this very honour that would keep them from committing one sin, will justify them in committing another; for the man who, under a sense of what is called honour, would not rob his neighbour of a penny, will injure unsuspecting innocence, and challenge to a duel the party who would charge him with having stated a single untruth, or would misrepresent or calumniate his name, or impute to him his sin. Honour, therefore, is not an adequate—certainly not a common—restraint from the crimes and sins which humanity is heir to.

Confession to a priest has been proposed as the most recent remedy, though it is the revival of an old prescription. In the Irish papers they attribute all our crimes to Protestantism; and they dilate with wonderful force upon what we, at least, have

not been able to discover — the lofty morality of Ireland; where the Confessional, they say, successfully acts, by keeping criminals within proper bounds. Now it does seem, judging from the history of the past, that for one the confessional restrains from sin, it tempts a hundred to plunge deeper and more unrestrainedly into sin, by this idea, “We have only to confess, do a little penance, get absolution, and start afresh;” the passions enjoying full play, and the conscience justifying every excess, till the path of the sinner is smoothed by the confessional to hell, not sanctified and directed to happiness and glory.

None of these seem powerful enough, or sufficiently comprehensive dissuasives from sin. — Joseph’s restraint appears the right one; and it is so, not only because it is in the Bible, but because all experience justifies it. “How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?” What does this assume? That God is the witness of our actions. This one thought is the most powerful and sanctifying that can be cherished in the human heart. You know that the sins which you have committed in secret you would not like a brother, a sister, a wife, a husband, a friend, to know; and you feel that if the eyes of a vast amphitheatre of human beings were all concentrated upon you, ever as you attempt to commit some offence, you would be restrained by such a searching presence. The eye that penetrates all matter, that fills as it dilates over all space, that is pure and holy, from which no secrets are hid, and to which the most sequestered

crannies, nooks, and recesses, and floating thoughts, desires, and passions of the human heart are naked — that omniscient eye is on me always and everywhere, as if there were none on earth beside me — “Thou, God, seest me,” how sanctifying, how restraining! Under a sense of this ledgers will be kept pure, houses of business will be honest, homes will be holy, sanctuaries religious, and human nature, under the elevating inspiration of such a thought, will approach to its culminating grandeur and happiness, when all shall know and love God, from the least even unto the greatest. If I address a single thoughtless reader, let me urge you when tempted to go where conscience forbids, to take with you the 139th Psalm, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Thou understandest my thought afar off.” There is no more powerful evidence of the omniscience of God than that one expression, “Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.” Students, who have to invent, discover, think, plan, and scheme, know that there are thoughts which you have a glimpse of, but have not grasped and made your own. They loom in the distant horizon, and you have not been able to bring them within your own horizon, so as clearly

to comprehend them. God sees these thoughts afar off. Before we have fully comprehended them ourselves, before they have come within the range of our perception, God sees and weighs their purity or their sin, and decides their character and destiny accordingly.

The expression, "How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" reveals to us a very important lesson, — that sin, whatever it be, is always against God. The wickedness of David was against the good Uriah; but when David confessed that wickedness, he said, "Against Thee, thee only, have I sinned." And so here Joseph felt that while the crime to which he was solicited would be against his master, yet that in its rebound it would be heard in heaven, and in its reflection be visible to God; and therefore he said, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" Let us never forget this lesson. If I were so dishonest as to steal £100 from a person, I should injure a brother by dishonesty, and that would be all my offence to him; but the sin that is the root of the dishonesty rises above the injured brother, and reaches God, and strikes against him. The loss is against my brother; the sin is against the God who made us both. A man can forgive what is done against a man; the Church can forgive what is done against the Church; a priest can forgive what is done against a priest; but neither the man, nor the Church, nor the priest, can go into a province in which they have no place, and forgive that which is done against God. If I injure a brother, that brother may forgive me, either

after I have made him restitution for the injury, or he may forgive me freely if I cannot; but the sin that was in the act that brother cannot forgive, nor can the priest forgive it, nor can the Church forgive it—God only can. I will confess my sin to my brother, so far as it is an offence against him, that I may obtain his forgiveness; but I will confess to God only the sin, that I may obtain that forgiveness which He only is competent, and which, we rejoice to know, He is ever willing and waiting to bestow. Thus we see that the sin which Joseph was tempted to commit would have been not only an injury against his neighbour, but a sin against God.

Let us see how in this restraint Joseph felt a deep and solemn sense of responsibility to God. He felt that it was not only a sin against God, but that he was under a deep and inexhaustible responsibility to Him, that must meet him at the judgment-seat of Christ, where words long hushed will reverberate again, and actions long forgotten will be placed in the light of God's holy countenance, and all things whatsoever we have done, whether good or evil, shall be reprobated or publicly forgiven, in the presence of God and of his holy angels.

Joseph's restraint recognises this other fact, that God punishes sin. Penalty and sin are inseparable, except by the application of the blood of Him who died for our sins. And, even in this life, in the case of the children of God, retribution may be felt and seen in many a nook and winding of their biography. Let even the most eminent Christian do some-

thing imprudently — results of bitterness will be reaped by him ; let him do something that is positively sinful, and the effects will be keenly felt in after life. Chastisement, it may be, in the case of the children of God ; but retribution, visible and traceable even in this life, is what all who have lived many years in the world are constrained to acknowledge and to confess.

Joseph's exclamation implies that sin must have been to him, and in his estimate, an extremely venomous and evil thing. It is the only terrible evil in the whole universe of God. Take sin out of the worst calamity, and you have taken the sting that would otherwise wound, and poison while it wounds, and the calamity itself almost rises to the nature of a blessing.

Sin is in some shape, directly or indirectly, recently or remotely, the source and spring of all the evil that is in the world. Why Omnipotence permits what Omnipotence could expunge at once, it is not for us to say. This, however, we do know, that sin will not have permanent dominion over any spot or nook that God made, but one. The only part of the Bible that ever perplexes me, — about which, however, we may rest perfectly satisfied that what we know not now, we shall know hereafter, — is that which tells us that there is one nook in this grand universe where there shall be the wail of ceaseless suffering, and the poison of irremediable sin. That is the most painful revelation in all God's Word. One could wish, in our present unenlightened state, that it were not so ; but, instead of wishing where

wishes are worthless, and instead of mitigating or explaining away what is palpably and unmistakably revealed, it is far better to proclaim that nook was never meant for us; hell was never kindled for us; it is not God's predestination or decree that any man should, in spite of himself, be damned for ever; there is offered to every man instant pardon, peace, and everlasting glory, if he will; the whole responsibility of the lost will be upon themselves; not one lost spirit will have any other recollection in that strange place—not meant for it, and to which it was not driven—than this, "I did it all myself: God never drove me here, I rejected the remedy, I have incurred the ruin, I endure the punishment." We have no adequate idea what sin is. We are like people who live in a pestilential and infected atmosphere—we get so accustomed to breathing it that we fancy it to be pure, we are so habituated to the poison that we scarcely feel it. But, we may depend upon it, that in the sight and estimate of an infinitely holy God, there is in sin all that is most hateful; what deranges the intellect, depraves the heart, and is not only homicidal and destructive of man, but if it could, would be deicidal, and upset God's throne and dominion over the universe. Joseph therefore resolved that, for no imaginary or anticipated pleasure, would he commit that which accompanies all breaches of God's law, the most awful thing in the universe—sin.

The true Christian judges of actions, not by what they seem, but by what God pronounces them to be. Joseph looked at sin, not in the light of Egypt, or

of Egypt's laws or customs, but in the light of God's Holy Word. It mattered not to him that sin was popular in Egypt's colleges and in Rahab's courts; it was condemned by a verdict, which to him was infallible and true, contained in God's Holy Word; and therefore his exclamation was, "How shall I commit this sin, this wickedness; and so, by doing what is wicked and injurious to man, perpetrate what is sinful in the sight of a holy God?"

And when Joseph brought God into his feeling and his conduct at this moment, it implied that he felt that He was holy and just—so holy that he looks on sin with abhorrence, or why should Joseph shrink from it?—so just that he pronounces on it, and over it, and about it its eternal desert, or why should Joseph fear it?—and so powerful that he is able to punish what he has holiness to hate; and therefore, "How shall I commit this wickedness, and sin against a holy, a just, and an omnipotent God?"

Joseph felt, when he used this expression, "God is my Maker;" and should not we feel so too? He made us so beautifully, with such exquisite proportions—so susceptible of enjoyment, so fitted to be happy; and shall the thing thus formed rise against Him who made it? shall the creature rebel against the laws of Him who is its Creator? How shall I do this wickedness, and—I, the earthen vessel, made so artistically by God's hand—sin against, or offend Him who lavished so much of his wisdom, his power his benevolence, on the construction of it?

Joseph indicated also that God was his Preserver. How shall I sin against Him who preserves me?

Here is another thought when tempted to sin, that the very life that enables to sin is the life that God continues. Shall I take that heart which God keeps beating, not for his benefit, but for my enjoyment, and glue it to attachments, to affections, objects, or passions, that are evil? Shall I make use of that health which God gives and spares me, or of that life whose years God is constantly adding to—shall I take the boon, and strike with that boon the Hand that deals it out to me? Shall I seize the mercy without thankfulness, and use the liberty till it becomes licence without restraint—and thus sin against and grieve the God who daily keeps mine eyes from tears, my feet from falling, my soul from death?

But Joseph regarded God as his Sovereign Ruler also. Shall I commit this wickedness, and sin against Him who is Sovereign, and Ruler, and King? Shall I join with apostates from him? Shall I enlist myself with rebels against my king? If I do this, and if all join in doing what each claims as his right, then must God's moral universe be disorganised. Every man has as good a right to commit any sin as you or I have; and if every man availed himself of that supposed right, and took the licence which his own passions, undirected and unrestrained by God's Holy Word, dictate and point out to him, what a world would this be! A world universally sinful would end in universal suicide. We can see that as a matter of experience the only reason why the sin of one sinner is not so destructive and disorganising as it would be, is that others have better

tastes, or rather, higher and holier principles, and therefore flagrant sin is the exception in our own land; while, alas! in other lands it is the awful and too predominant stain. Remarkable enough it is, that wherever the passions of man get full power, and the ties and affinities that are consecrated in the Bible, and still hallowed and revered amongst us, are trodden under foot and snapped in sunder,—as in some continental lands,—the human race seems to deteriorate, and physically and politically the nation sinks that is not characterised and elevated by the righteousness that exalteth a people.

“How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God, who so loved me that he has promised that the woman’s seed shall bruise the serpent’s head, and that Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, shall come for me in the fulness of the times?” I know nothing so restraining to a Christian’s heart, from doing what the Christian’s conscience sees to be evil in the sight of God, as this, I am sinning against, not a Creator only, not a Legislator only, but against that Father who so loved me in my ruins, that in spite of my sins He has raised me from them, and taken me back to his bosom, and blotted out all my guilt, and purchased me by the precious blood of his own incarnate and only Son. “How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against Him I love, who first loved me?” The greatest restraint against offending a person is loving him. Intense love seems to exercise an attraction that keeps all within the orbit they are meant and designed to move in; and in proportion to the

love you feel to another will be the sacrifices you will make, the appetites you will deny, the price you will pay, the time you will spend, in order to gratify and please. We love God because he first loved us. And what is love? Love is the fulfilling of the law. If there be love to the Legislator, there will be reverence to the Legislator's commandments; and whether it be the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th commandment, because each law bears the superscription of the Law-giver, whom you love because he loved you, you will faithfully observe it, and pray in that most beautiful litany, the 119th Psalm, "Incline mine heart to thy statutes, O Lord, and by thy grace I will never forget thy holy law."

We see in the Gospel, or in the Word of God, the truest and strongest motive to all proper obedience. The man who lives under what is called the fear of God (and I remember Joseph spake to his brethren, and said, "I fear God"), who lives under the restraining influence of the fear, not the terror of God—the reverence of God—made up of love to a father and obedience to a sovereign blended into one—is the subject of a motive that prompts with inexhaustible spring, that serves in every trial: in the warehouse, in the counting-house, in the parliament, in the palace, in the sanctuary. Such a one has in his heart a motive power that instead of parting with its strength, gains energy from exercise, and enables him by its inner vitality to resist the Evil One, and to be more than conqueror through Him that loved him.

Thus the most loyal servant of our Sovereign, the bravest soldier in the army, the best servant in our houses of business, will not be the man who says he fears God, who professes religion, but who has it planted a living power within him. We may depend upon it that he who fears God will prove the best soldier, the best sailor, and the best subject; and we need nothing inspired into our country's heart but the earnest love of God, in order to raise this country to the greatest pitch of grandeur and magnificence. A Wellington will not be wanting to defend it when a Wellington is wanted; and when none are to be found, there will be spread over it—its shield and its shelter—the great God himself.

This motive not only restrains from sin, but prompts also to everything that is good and great. I do not believe that the fear of God is a sort of universal police, merely pulling back from evil; but an everlasting and ever-present motive prompting men to do—what it has previously taught them to love—“whatsoever things are true, and just, and honest, and of good report.” In other words, the grace of God not only makes martyrs who patiently endure, but heroes also who nobly overcome. And wherever that grace is implanted in the heart, there man's praise and man's censure will be felt as comparatively feeble—since he who looketh and judgeth is God. I will, therefore, not only restrain myself from this wickedness because it is sin against God, but I will also bind myself to that noble duty because it is pleasing and acceptable to God. We



need only to have Christianity like the air we breathe, reaching to the lowest, and embracing the widest, till our own country is made the vestibule of Eden, the dawn of the Millennial day. Evermore should we, by God's grace, help every institution or society that tends to enlighten, sanctify, and purify, and thus to add to the dignity of the man the grandeur of the saint—to give men the liberty of Christ's freedmen and the affection of God's sons.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN.

"Like the sweet melody which faintly lingers
Upon the wind-harp's strings at close of day,
When gently touched by evening's dewy fingers,
It breathes a low and melancholy lay ;
So the calm voice of sympathy me seemeth,
And while its magic spell is round me cast,
My spirit in its cloistered silence dreameth,
And vaguely blends the future with the past."

"But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me." — GEN. xl. 14.

THE words of Joseph are also translated in the margin, "Remember me with thee when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me." Both translations convey the same obvious meaning to the reader.

When Joseph had interpreted the dream of the butler or cup-bearer of Pharaoh, and had told him how unjustly he was cast into prison, and also expressed his sense of that injustice in the meekest and mildest manner, he asked him, when he should be elevated to authority and power, to use the influence that he might then have in endeavouring to obtain the release of one who had obliged him by the gratuitous interpretation of his dream.

It seems at first perplexing that Joseph, who

could predict with certainty the future of the butler, should apparently be unable to predict the future of himself. He prophesies in the interpretation of the dream what shall be respecting his fellow-prisoner; he seems to have been ignorant of the future lot of himself, the inspired interpreter of the dream. It appears also strange that one who had so many providential interpositions of God, should appeal to the mere human help of a heathen idolatrous cup-bearer, of Pharaoh for assistance. If this was on the part of Joseph a failing of his faith, it was only in common with all the patriarchs. Not a biography do we read that has no discords in it; not a portrait have we studied that has no flaws — flaws not from the painter's pencil, but from the original subject itself, and so clearly visible because of the faithful transcript of living and actual character. There is no perfect character in the Bible but One; there is none that will bear inspection, microscopic and minute, but One; and all the other characters recorded in this Book seem in their group to constitute the dark background from which is thrown up in richer and brighter brilliancy the spotless image of Him who spake as never man spake, lived as never man lived, died as man never died, and was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

There may not, however, have been a failing of faith on the part of the patriarch here; it may have been duty that he discharged when he asked the butler to remember him. God uses means for the rescue, as well as for the protection of them that are

his. There is not a page in the Bible in which we do not read of human means sanctified by God to accomplish his own purposes. He can work without means; he can work against means; he does ordinarily work with means; and whether with, or without, or against, he always works in sovereignty, in beneficence to man, and for glory to himself. He uses the dewdrops and the sunbeams to bring to maturity the kindly fruits of the earth. He uses talent, piety, eloquence, and learning, in order to promote his own cause; and thus there may have been, on the part of Joseph, a sense of duty to use such means as were within his reach, in order to secure that escape from punishment which he had not merited — an escape that was indeed his right, and would have been to him no favour.

There is no statement, however, that this was Joseph's feeling; but we feel that if we had been placed in his circumstances, ours would have been exactly the same recourse. There is something truer than reasoning, more conclusive to man's mind than logic — the expression of perfect nature. Joseph predicted deliverance to the butler; how natural to say to him, "Well, you will be out in three days; I shall remain. If you have interest with Pharaoh, as you will have, use that interest in order to succour me." Joseph would have been more than human if he had not done so. It is the perfect and true humanity of the portrait that so commends it to our consciences. If Joseph was the greatest saint, he did not therefore cease to be a true man. Saintship is not the extinction of manhood, but the sanctifica-

tion, the elevation, the ennobling of it. Joseph could only know that it was God's will that he should remain a prisoner by his having exhausted all the means of escape that were placed in his power; and when he had done so, he could then fold his hands quietly, and bow his head meekly, and remain in the dungeon where Pharaoh held him, but where Pharaoh, without God's permission, could not keep him.

It is the instinctive tendency of all to seek the aid of those whom we call in this world our more fortunate brethren. Nothing is more natural than the language of Joseph, in any grade of life, or in the experience of any generation of mankind. Do we see the companion of our boyhood, our schoolfellow in earlier years, raised to rank, to influence, to power, where he is able, if he may be willing, to assist what, in the language of the world, are called his less fortunate countrymen, how common to say to him, "It is well with thee; think on me now in the days of your prosperity and power." Or if our equal or familiar friend is elevated in the providence of God to high military, political, social, or national power, having the command of great resources, and within his reach the bestowal of great patronage, it is natural, and as such it is not condemned, to say, "Think of me when it is well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me." In earlier days we say to a schoolfellow, "Should you get on best and first, do not forget me who am on the lowest part of the ladder, but think on me when it shall be well with thee." And when the

emigrant departs, the first pioneer of the glen, to distant Australia, those he has left behind naturally say, "Let us hear when it is well with thee, and show kindness to those thou hast left behind, when it shall be well and prosperous with thee." Are not, in short, the words of the patriarch the very accents of humanity? Is not his petition the keynote of a thousand wants? We can well imagine the voice of the patriarch still sounding from a thousand places in the midst of every land, and saying to those with whom it is now well, "Think on me, and show kindness unto me."

The poor, the ill-lodged, the ill-fed, breathing the pestilential air of the garret, or living in the dark, damp, underground cellar, the victims of the first conquering epidemic, the subjects always of those twin epidemics that have become endemics, sin and misery—without a fire to warm or a rag to cover them in the winter—speak from a darker and deeper than Joseph's prison to every well-fed and well-off man, "Think of us, and show kindness unto us."

Methinks, also, that the children hanging about the streets, the lanes, and alleys of this great metropolis—destitute of all elevating instruction—having no parents, or, what is worse still, having parents who sustain the natural, but none of the social, moral, and Christian relationships of parents—unable from poverty, and indisposed from the hardening effects of vice, to educate their offspring—send forth from every corner, nook, and alley, a voice, if not audible, at least inferential, to every

congregation prosperous and well-doing, to every family whose children are well taken care of, "It is well with you, show kindness unto us, the victims of a great calamity; show kindness unto us, and remember us, for it is well with you, that God may remember you."

The weary needlewoman, who earns by day just what keeps soul and body barely together—hopeless in the present, despairing of the future—one of those terrible concomitants of civilisation that make many minds doubtful whether civilisation so much excels savageism and barbarism as some suppose; or the over-tasked assistant in the shops and warehouses of a great city—tormented all day by the frivolous talk of the thoughtless purchaser—kept toiling, standing, weary till nine, ten, eleven, or twelve o'clock at night, exhausted by labour instead of refreshed by sleep—says to his employer, who once stood in his place, "It is now well with thee, show kindness unto me; not in charity, but of right; it is your duty, it is our due."

The Jew, also, to take a view of it in a still higher sense, going about to establish his own righteousness, and having not yet submitted to the righteousness of Christ; the Romanist, a stranger to light, to freedom, to the glorious Gospel; the heathen at home—(what a phrase! yet how true!)—the heathen in England, who hear nothing of Christianity but the chimes of its bells, and see nothing of the ambassadors of peace except at their weddings, if indeed there, and at the burial of their children, for it is certain they will be there;—all these appeal in

silent, but to the ear of faith still piercing accents, and say, "It is well with thee, think on us, and show kindness unto us." And these voices that rise from the crowd—from the depths and lowest strata of our social system, from what are called "the dangerous classes," dangerous, not by God's making, but by man's criminal neglect—are reverberating from noble halls, and from royal palaces; they will not be hushed, they will rise in yet more piercing tones at the judgment-seat of Christ; and "inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these, ye did it not unto me." "It is well with you," they say, "think on us, and show kindness unto us."

Here, too, the persecuted and the oppressed give utterance to such language as this. This great country used to be the avenger of the oppressed and the captive wherever he was. But men are either wiser, or are become more cautious; nations are jealous of national intervention; statesmen are afraid, with their heavy official responsibility, of provoking a quarrel, the end and the issue of which they do not know; and hence such cases as the *Madiais* of Florence or Tuscany are the most painful and vexing proofs of the awful principles of the great apostasy; and what tools and puppets that dread delusion can make of the nations and governments of the world. One was sentenced to fifty-six months at the galleys, with hard labour, and the other to forty-four months at the *ergastolo*, or female galleys, and each of them to three additional years of *surveillance*, with the costs of the trial, for truth's sake. The letter sent from the wife to the husband

is so beautiful, and so expressive of true Christian feeling, that it is worth reading. She says, "My dear Madiai, you know that I have always loved you, but how much more ought I to love you, now that we have been together in the battle of the Great King—that we have been beaten, but not vanquished! I hope that through the merits of Jesus Christ, God our father will have accepted our testimony, and will give us grace to drink to the last drop the portion of that bitter cup which is prepared for us, with returning of thanks. My good Madiai, life is only a day, and a day of grief! Yesterday we were young, to-day we are old! Nevertheless, we can say with old Simeon, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' Courage, my dear, since we know by the Holy Spirit that this Christ, loaded with opprobrium, trodden down and calumniated, is our Saviour; and we, by His holy light and power, are called to defend the holy Cross, and Christ who died for us, receiving His reproaches, that we may afterwards participate in his glory. Do not fear if the punishment be hard. God, who made the chains fall from Peter, and opened the doors of his prison, will never forget us. Keep in good spirits, let us trust entirely in God. Let me see you cheerful, as I trust, by the same grace, you will see me cheerful. I embrace you with my whole heart. Your affectionate wife, Rosa Madiai." The accents of these words will reverberate through the length and breadth of our own noble land; they will be borne by the winds across the Atlantic to that great coun-

try beyond it—only excelled, if I may venture to say so, by our own—the Republic of America; and there, where the Word of God is free, and every man has liberty to read it, there may be lifted up prayers, that the God who smote the chains from Peter, may smite the chains from these; and these two prisoners, thus punished for using a privilege that God has given, may by their testimony shake to its very foundation that dread superstition which enslaves the free, corrupts the pure, and makes the reading of God's Word a crime, and the evidence of heresy our possessing it. But the least we can do, if statesmen cannot interfere, is to feel thankful, and that is the reason it is alluded to, that it is well with us; we are free (and oh how sweet is the breath of freedom, if we should only have bread and water to drink!), we have privileges; and the least we can do is to listen in sympathy to the prisoners that still suffer, saying from their deep dungeon, "Britons, Americans, it is well with you, show kindness to us, if you can. If not, think on us at that throne of grace where appeals are never made in vain; for it is the privilege of those who are well to think of those who are ill, and of those who are free to pity them that are slaves, and of those who are at liberty to sympathise with the captive, the prisoner, and the exile."

The words, in short, employed by Joseph are the varied accents of all humanity in all the phases of its suffering. They are the cry of ignorance to light, of sin to Christianity, of slavery to freedom, of orphanage and widowhood to all who can help them. It seems too the cry of the whole dumb (if

one may use an expression that seems almost contradictory) and brute creation. What does the Apostle tell us in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans? That a day comes when the sons of God shall be manifested, when the redemption of the body shall be attained, and when we shall be elevated to a platform of dignity, grandeur, and power, unprecedented since Adam was a sovereign in Paradise; and at that day, says the Apostle, all creation shall be lifted up with us; but at present, he adds, the whole creation groans and travails—just like Joseph in his prison, waiting and longing for deliverance: and if one could put words in creation's mouth, these accents would instinctively occur, "When it shall be well with you, sons of God, and you are elevated to your destined dignity, forget not the creation that groans and travails, but see that it is also reconstituted and reinstated in its place." We read in the voyages of Captain Parry, a curious incident on the Polar Sea. A bear was left upon a large iceberg that had drifted off from the main continent of ice, and was floating rapidly southward before the wind, and under the rays of a meridian sun. The narrator states that the cries of the bear, as it was drifted southward—the ice melting the nearer south it was borne—having no prospect of food, no ability to swim, and no possibility of deliverance—its tenure of life lessening rapidly every foot that the iceberg was born sun-ward on the sea—were most piercing. That iceberg, I thought, is our earth, which has drifted from God; the cries of that bear what the Apostle calls the groaning and

travailing of all creation after deliverance; and the voice to be uttered by the lips of universal nature, "Sons of God, when you shall be manifested, think of us, that we may share in your restoration, and that thus a creation which your sins have injured may share in your resurrection, and be restored to more than its Eden beauty, and rebuilt in more than its ancient magnificence." And how rejoicing it is to every Christian to know that every year, every day, every hour that passes, this time comes nearer! Every time the clock strikes is an hour nearer this event; every time the shadows close in is a day nearer this manifestation of the sons of God—when all creation, with creation's Lord, shall be made happy, as they were originally, for ever.

But let us notice the obverse of this—the duties of those who are addressed to hear this cry, and to help. It is the duty of those who have, to respond to the petition of those who have not. The greatest receivers ought to be the greatest givers. Where there is the most magnificent expenditure there ought to be the greatest munificence of charity.

Let us view this cry as the cry of the human, of man to man, and think how we should answer it. An ancient heathen said, "I am a man, and nothing that is human is or ought to be strange to me." If want, sorrow, distress, pain, suffering, imprisonment, speak to you in the language of Joseph, sympathise, succour, deliver, as you may be able. The longest tenure is always where there is the greatest liberality. It is not the most munificent, but the most extravagant men, who come to beggary. True

liberality is never forgotten of God. Is there a brother, a sister, a relative, a friend, an old foe, if you like, reduced to distress, destitute, needy, wanting; and do any of these speak to you, with whom it is now well, and say, "Remember us, and show kindness to us?" Leave thy gift at the altar; go first and do thy duty to thy brother, thy friend, thy foe, and then come and offer thy gift on the altar, and it will rise with better and freer acceptance before God.

In such liberal responses to such appeals there is the purest happiness. The rich man, whose heart is right in the sight of God, never feels so pure and unalloyed a happiness as when his hand opens in profuse liberality to the wants and necessities of the poor. He who knew what happiness was by having drunk deeply of its opposite, human sorrow, the Son of God, said, "It is more happy to give than to receive." It is one of the highest tests of true Christian character that you feel more happiness reflected from the sovereign that you give, than was ever felt by you from the sovereign that you earned. The flower is blessed by what it gives to the bee; the insect visitor is enriched itself, and leaves not the flower it visits a bit poorer notwithstanding. There is a luxury in giving; and one wonders when the heathen king offered a reward to him who would discover a new pleasure, that nobody thought of suggesting that purest, most delicious luxury, of hearing a widow thankful, an orphan bless you, and a poor man heap benedictions upon your head. It is more blessed to give than to receive. The

pleasures of possession are thereby mightily heightened.

But this is the cry of the human ; let us hear the cry of a yet higher nature—of the spiritually destitute and needy to those who have the Gospel, and the power to send it. It is true that the spiritually destitute feel themselves least destitute. There is no sign of a man's spiritual condition so unfavourable as this, that he thinks he is spiritually rich, increased in goods, and has, spiritually, need of nothing ; for it is then that, like the Laodicean Church, he knows not that he is naked, and poor, and blind, and miserable. At this moment, in this great city, somewhere about one hundred and fifty souls pass to the judgment-seat every twenty-four hours, that is, when the mortality is the lowest. In the two hours that we meet together in the sanctuary, some half-dozen, or it may be ten or twelve, souls in London have gone to the judgment-seat of Christ. If we had eyes to see, we should see souls ceaselessly ascending in clouds ; if we had ears to hear, we should hear the trumpet-blast that summons them to judgment every moment. If, like the prophet's eyes, ours were opened to see all that was around them, we should behold spirits ascending from the wrecks that they have resigned—some catching gleams from afar of the lights of the city of our God, others plunging into a darkness more intense than that they have left behind them. Are we salt ? Then it is ours to give savour to all that are about us. Are we light ? It is that others may be lightened. Are we blessed ? is it well with us ? It

is that we may show kindness to them that are ignorant and destitute. If we be lifted from the fearful pit and from the miry clay, and placed upon a rock, the Lord establishing our goings, it is not that we may knock away the ladder by which we have risen, but that we may stretch out a helping hand, and enable those who are left behind to ascend to the sunshine, and enjoy the happiness that God has given us. In human liberality there is always the greatest blessing—he that scattereth increaseth; and it is much more so in spiritual things. It is they who give most to whom most shall be given; till the Christian finds that his heart, like the widow's cruse of oil and barrel of meal, has only multiplied within it the blessings that it distributes and showers around it on others. See, says some one, that little fountain yonder—away yonder in the distant mountain—shining like a thread of silver through the thick copse, and sparkling like a diamond in its healthful activity—it is hurrying on with tinkling feet to bear its tribute to the river. See, it passes a stagnant pool, and the pool hails it: “Whither away, master streamlet?” “I am going to the river to bear this cup of water God has given me.” “Ah, you are very foolish for that—you'll need it before the summer's over. It has been a backward spring, and we shall have a hot summer to pay for it—you will dry up then.” “Well,” said the streamlet, “if I am to die so soon, I had better work while the day lasts. If I am likely to lose this treasure from the heat, I had better do good with it while I have it.” So on it.

went, blessing and rejoicing in its course. The pool smiled complacently at its own superior foresight, and husbanded all its resources, letting not a drop steal away. Soon the midsummer heat came down, and it fell upon the little stream. But the trees crowded to its brink, and threw out their sheltering branches over it in the day of adversity, for it brought refreshment and life to them; and the sun peeped through the branches and smiled complacently upon its dimpled face, and seemed to say, "It's not in my heart to harm you;" and the birds sipped its silver tide, and sung its praises; the flowers breathed their perfume upon its bosom; the beasts of the field loved to linger by its banks; the husbandman's eye always sparkled with joy as he looked upon the line of verdant beauty that marked its course through his fields and meadows; and so on it went, blessing and blessed of all! And where was the prudent pool? Alas! in its inglorious inactivity it grew sickly and pestilential. The beasts of the field put their lips to it, but turned away without drinking; the breeze stopped and kissed it by *mistake*, but shrunk chilled away. It caught the malaria in the contact, and carried the ague through the region, and the inhabitants caught it, and had to move away; and at last the very frogs cast their venom upon the pool and deserted it, and heaven, in mercy to man, smote it with a hotter breath and dried it up! But did not the little stream exhaust itself? O no! God saw to that. It emptied its full cup into the river, and the river bore it on to the sea, and the sea welcomed it; and the sun

smiled upon the sea, and the sea sent up its incense to greet the sun, and the clouds caught in their capacious bosoms the incense from the sea, and the winds, like waiting steeds, caught the chariots of the clouds and bore them away—away—to the very mountain that gave the little fountain birth, and there they tipped the brimming cup, and poured the grateful baptism down; and so God saw to it, that the little fountain, though it gave so fully and so freely, never ran dry. And if God so bless the fountain, will he not bless you, my friends, if, “as ye have freely received, ye also freely give?” Be assured he will. Such is the substance of a truly illustrative incident. How just! and, at the same time, a comment on the Scripture text quoted so often, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The distressed, the afflicted, the suffering, the dying, say to you, “It is well with you, show kindness to us;” it is our duty to go wherever there is a mourner, and offer comfort; wherever there is a sufferer, try if you cannot give relief—at least say the soothing word, which is often more delightful than the most powerful opiate draught. Go to the bed-side of the sick and comfort them. It is a Sabbath-day luxury to visit the sick, the sorrowful, the dying. Go solemnly, but do not put on in the sick-room what you have not in the streets—a sort of melancholy, mourning cloak, nor enter with a footfall fitted to damp, dispirit, and discourage. Go into the room of the sick, the suffering, and the dying, not with a mourning cloak put on for the occasion, but in the every-day robe of every-day life,

with bright hopes sparkling upon it, with joy and peace inwrought into its texture. Tell them good tidings—they feel sad; proclaim to them that Jesus is risen, and was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; that He took upon him our nature, and that the loneliest sufferer in appearance before man is never forlorn or alone, if he believe in Jesus, and has trust in him as his only Saviour, and Sacrifice, and King.

Let us recollect, too, that the most illustrious names in the catalogues of the history of every land are those who have been, not most rich, not most noble, not always most learned—but most useful. We can let go, and allow to drop from the galaxy in our national firmament, great historians, great poets; but none of us can let drop, or consign to oblivion, the name of Wilberforce, the advocate of the West-Indian slave; nor of Howard, who visited the prison to gauge its depth, and study how the Josephs that were there might be raised to freedom, to honour, or to health; nor of Luther, who, free himself with that freedom with which Christ makes his people free, sought to make free all besides. But, above all, surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, whose names are holy, whose birthdays and deathdays are the brightest and the noblest anniversaries, let us look to Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith; and know and be assured that he will not treat Joseph as Pharaoh's butler treated him, but that, raised to a throne, and now at God's right hand, he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Jesus was made per-

fect through suffering—he was pierced with all our sympathies—he tasted death for every man; it is now well with him; we may now say to Jesus, with the thorough consciousness that he hears us, “Blessed Lord, thou hast passed through our prison, thou hast ascended to thine own bright palace in the skies, thou hast overcome the sharpness of death, thou hast opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, thou sittest at the right hand of God the Father, thou hast all power in heaven and in earth, thou art throned on the riches of the universe. The glorious company of the Apostles praise thee; the noble army of martyrs praise thee; the goodly fellowship of the prophets praise thee. Thou shalt come to be our Judge. Blessed Lord, it is well with thee, show kindness unto us; and think on us:

“And when our failing lips grow dumb,
And mind and memory flee;
When thou shalt in thy kingdom come,
Jesus, remember me!”

Is it well with you, dear reader, in a better sense than ever escapes from the lips of the world? Not is it well with you in bodily health—a precious blessing, but still a secondary one—but is it well with you in that soul-prosperity that John speaks of when he writes his epistle, praying that a soul may prosper? Is it well with you in that sense? Are you justified by the righteousness of Jesus? Have you fled, under a sense of guilt and condemnation, to his blood? Have you appreciated the current of God’s great love, that comes through

him to you, and of which he is but the expression? Are your hearts changed? Is your heart the subject of a transformation equal to the resurrection of the dead? Were you asked, as it was asked of the Shunamite of old, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband, thy child? Could you answer, in the language of contentment, of peace, and truth, which proceeded from the Shunamite's heart, "It is well; I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day. My trust is in that precious sacrifice, my confidence is in that paternal love; the hills may depart, and the mountains may be removed, but the covenant of God's peace will not depart, and his lovingkindness, unlike the lovingkindness of the cupbearer to Joseph, will remain the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Is it well with you spiritually, eternally? Is it well with your husband, your child, your neighbour, your friend, your foe—the Jew upon the streets, the heathen at home, the heathen abroad? Wherever a duty is perceived by you demanding to be done, there responsibility, inexhaustible as immortality, cleaves to your soul.

If this Book be a fable—if this religion, about which I speak so much, be a dream—if Christianity be a cunningly devised fable—fling it from you. Why hesitate a single moment? Why persist in the absurd ceremonies of having your children baptised, of being married in the house of God, of keeping a Bible, of coming to church? Why not have the manliness to trample the whole thing under foot,

and despise it? But if it be true—and there is not a conscience that, in spite of passions, prejudices, and wishes, does not justify its claims—if it be true, and it is true—for the blood of martyrs proves it—the performance of stupendous miracles of beneficence proves it—if it be true, throw your whole heart into it, and live it, and love it, and, if needs be, die for it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LORD IN THIS PLACE.

“And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” — GEN. xxviii. 16, 17.

JACOB had lost his early and his deep sense of the power and presence of a personal God. His sins were on his memory, their guilt upon his conscience; the impressions—the early impressions—of his God were covered up or effaced by them. He lay down a weary and wayworn wanderer in the desert, with no pillow but the hard stones — no curtain, but the enveloping air, and no cover or roof in that desert but the broad and starry concave of an eastern sky. He lay down probably, too, without a single solemn thought of God: he was a refugee, he was also a conscious sinner; and the recollection of sin in most cases either brings us nearer to God, that it may be forgiven, or drives us further from God, in order, if possible, that it may be forgotten. These are the two effects of sin. When sin is overruled of God, it brings us to him for its forgiveness; when it dominates within, it drives us from him, in order that in the greatest darkness, and in the most distant retreat, we may forget it and its retributions. Jacob

lay down in this desert, and slept upon his stony pillow ; and thought, and supposed, and acted as if he really believed, that wherever God might be, he could not be at least in that blank solitude — that bare heath — that miserable desert.

God forgets not Jacob, though Jacob forgets and forsakes him. During the patriarch's deep sleep in the desert, God draws near to him — unsought, unprayed for ; unveils to his heart what he unveiled to the eye of Moses—all his glory ; and speaks to that miserable refugee, not words of retribution, as his conscience might have anticipated, and as his sins deserved, but soft whispers of reconciliation, of mercy, and of peace. Truly, God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts. He opens the eye of the mind of the patriarch — penetrates the secret chambers of his soul with a celestial and a sanctifying light—makes luminous within him long forgotten, but deep-engraven recollections—and kindles up in the cells of his heart the reminiscences of days that had passed away, and that he wickedly congratulated himself were gone for ever. God does not need architects or marble in order thus to make a church ; he can make the lonely bosom a holy chancel ; he can make the desert itself glow with all the brightness of heaven ; and when there are no worshippers here, he can people earth with angels to do his will, and minister to his great and solemn purposes.

God discloses himself. This seems a very simple truism, and yet it is the key to what revelation is. A discovery is something that we make by search-

ing; a revelation is something that God gives by grace. If we were to find out God by dint of our own exertions, we should magnify ourselves to a level with God; but when we are so ignorant that we stumble at the very threshold of inquiry, and so short-sighted that we cannot see beyond our own horizon, and God in his sovereignty and grace makes known what he is, when we could not find it out—this humbles us, and exalts him. We have lost God: we lost him in Paradise; and, by searching, man never could have found him out. Sin dimmed man's eye, stained God's earth, and obscured that image which was once so legible upon it. All that we can do here is to gather a few stones together, and make a pillow in its desert, and lie still. But what a blessed thought—that God pities our helplessness, compassionates our ignorance, lights up the desert with his glory, and makes known himself, not in the imagery of wrath, as we justly deserved, but in all the soft and beneficent imagery of God in Christ, uniting heaven and earth, and of twain making one! God has drawn near to us, as he drew near to Jacob; not in answer to our claims, or in acknowledgment of our merits, but in spite of our sins. God comes after us when we flee from him; and shows his mercy upon us when we have utterly and entirely forgotten him.

Jacob awoke after the night had passed away; but the vision he had seen was not effaced. He felt in the morning when he awoke as if in contact with God; the vision indeed was gone, but the glory, the trail of glory, it left behind, yet shone from

every tree-top, and sparkled from every stone of Jacob's pillow; and the whole desert, so dark and dreary when he lay down to sleep, now blossomed like the rose, and glowed with holy light; and Jacob said, in the recollection of the bright vision, and under the sensations of its lingering, joyous impression, even after it had passed away, "Surely, surely, this is no kindling by human genius; this is no devout imagination of mind; surely Jêhovah was in this place, though I, in my ignorance and my sinfulness, knew it not." God is in places still where we least expect him. Though sin has stained the earth, God has not forsaken it. The natural, or normal condition of this world is that of suffering. We are prone to think that suffering, and war, and famine, and plague, and pestilence, and sickness, and death, are very unnatural things. The fact is, they are natural; that is to say natural according to the state of our present world. In Paradise, there was no such thing. God did not make sin, nor plague, nor pestilence, nor famine, nor war, nor battle, nor death. These things once were not known in our world; but the moment that sin entered—whence it came, how it came, why it came, none pretend to explain, and it is one only of the ten thousand things that nobody can explain—its multitudinous progeny, as in the fable of the opening of Pandora's box, appeared in the shape of all the ills and aches that flesh is heir to; and if this world, as it exists since sin entered, be not always scarred by battle, ploughed by shot, torn by convulsions, infected with plague, pale with sickness—

if it be not always and everywhere thus, it is because God in his wrath remembers mercy, and gives lights in the midst of our deserved darkness to remind us what we were, and what by grace through Christ Jesus, if believers, we shall one day be. This world is sinful; it has forgotten God, it has rebelled against him, but yet he pities it. We can hear the sound of his footsteps often on it; we can see gleams of his glory as he passes by. It is not, with all its wickedness, an orphan world, nor a forsaken orb; on the contrary—how wonderful!—it is the orb that, to speak in the language of man, God thinks more about than any other in the universe. It is not probable, as a philosopher at Cambridge has asserted, that there is not, but rather as Sir David Brewster (at least an equal philosopher), at St. Andrew's, proves, that there is a plurality of worlds; and that these worlds are peopled with busy tenantry, more innumerable than ours. But whether they be sinless, or whether they in any way share in our sin, God left the ninety and nine orbs in the infinitude of space, that needed no repentance, and came after this lost and stray world; and found it, and has laid it nearest to his heart, and will carry it home to his own glory, rejoicing all the way. God forgets not us, though we forget him. We not only forget him,—if that were all, it would not be so criminal,—but we oppose God; because, when sin nestles in the conscience, and breaks out in the life, and we are determined to cherish and give hospitality to it, our only ease lies in getting rid of the thought of God. And what will not man do or dare to get rid

of that thought—a thought that opposes him, rebukes him, prophesies evil about him continually? What explains atheism? What is the key-note and ground of the horrible cry, “No God?” Sin, conscious sin. Sin and God cannot co-exist in the same bosom, except by bringing the sin to God in order to have it forgiven; but it never can be held there in order to be cherished, with the thought of God shining and burning beside it. And therefore man must either renounce God or his sin. There is no medium, there is no consistent footing on which he can stand ten minutes—logically and consistently stand, if his eyes be only opened to see it—between the living, evangelical, vital religion of the New Testament, and that horrible, freezing vacuum, in which no wing can soar, and no living thing can breathe, called Atheism; when man, either partaking of the madness of the lunatic or the wickedness of the demon, wishes, not says, that there were no God.

But the presence vouchsafed to the patriarch on this occasion, when God appeared to him, was not mere omnipresence. When a preacher speaks of God’s presence, and says God was present with certain persons, some go away observing, “Why everybody knows that. If we ascend into heaven, he is there; if we descend into hell, he is there; if we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, he is there. Then why tell us that he was with Joseph, or that he is with us?” The word, “presence of God,” is used in Scripture in two senses. There is his natural omni-

presence, which fills all space and penetrates all nature; there is also his special gracious presence, which is realised and enjoyed only by the people of God. Moses knew quite well the meaning of God's omnipresence; and yet he says to him, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." Christ felt his own omnipresence when he said, "Whosoever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He is in one sense in the midst of the most wicked mob, as he is in the midst of the most godly people. But he is only present with two or three met in his name, in that gracious, loving sense which leaves blessings behind, and proves that God was in this place, though we knew it not. And when he is pleased to make that presence felt by his own people in their hearts, or in the midst of his own congregation, it awakens gently every affectionate feeling, disarms every hostile emotion, dissolves the enmity of the human heart, and leads the most thoughtless to exclaim in the exuberance of their new joy, "Truly, it was good for us to be here; we know it is fact, not fancy, that where two or three are met together in Christ's name, there he has been in the midst of them."

But very often, when God is present, we do not always sensibly feel it. Like the patriarch, we learn afterwards, what we do not always appreciate at the time. Often and again his gracious and sanctifying presence has been with us, and we have not known it. We have felt at one moment as if utterly forsaken; we have said within ourselves,

“God has forgotten us, and our God has forsaken us.” We have felt that whoever may be here, God is not in his gracious presence. Nevertheless we may have been deeply mistaken. It is not by present feeling, but by future facts, that we ascertain whether God has been here or not; it is not our present knowledge, but our after experience, by which we discover that our saddest moments were after all our sweetest; and that when we felt least of a present God, his footsteps were leaving their most numerous prints behind them; and God was there, though we knew it not. We have been perhaps in the house of prayer; we have been listening to the words of eternal life as proclaimed by the preacher; we felt no conscious interest in them; we heard no words of comfort that kindled precious thoughts in our hearts. Preacher and people often come to the sanctuary so dead, so cold, that it seems as if nothing but an earthquake could rouse us, or a spark from heaven itself thaw our cold hearts. And whether we preach or hear, that is more or less the experience of us all; when in the house of God—it may be owing partly to bodily health, or to mental trouble, it may be owing to sin or unbelief, or to a thousand things—the ordinances have seemed to us like empty channels, and the word preached, as the idle wind that men regard not. We came to the house of God cold, we left it indifferent. It had all the coldness, the chillness, and the apathy of the tomb. We said to ourselves, “God was not with us to-day; his presence was not in the midst of us. He had left us for some more favoured spot;

we had nothing but the stone for our pillow, and the bleak desert for our bed, and the bleak winds for our companions, and the cold sky for our canopy." After many days a text long hidden and forgotten, suddenly flashes into life; in the midst of some great trouble that text stands out over-head like a bright star in the sky, indicating the way that leads to peace. A seed seems to have been dropped in the heart that has been quickening in its silent depths. We discover it was the text that we heard on that dead day—the very truth that came to our hearing on that cold and wintry Sabbath service; and we come to the patriarch's own conclusion, that the Lord was even in that cold, wintry Sabbath service, though we knew it not.

We have been, perhaps, to use another phasis of the same thought, in the marts and thoroughfares of commerce, or our hearts were too deep in the anxieties and troubles of the world; our affections were loaded with its cares, and bowed to earth by its clinging thoughts. "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" was uppermost in our minds; our sense of God was dim, our thoughts of God cold. We were in the midst of the world, but religion and God and the sense of God, were altogether absent, or distant, or far above us. It seemed so to us, but we have afterwards discovered that God was then laying, in the wrecks of castles that we built, the foundations of a house not made with hands; that he was preparing, while we were in the world and forgetting him, the soil of our hearts for living seed

and for golden hearts; that his glory, though unseen, was then and there operating; and other days of the year have emerged more bright and beautiful just because of those wintry night seasons; and all things that we thought working against us have been working for us; and after many days we have said with shame, because of our ignorance, but with thankfulness because of God's goodness, "Even in the midst of that world, when I did not think of him, nor even recollect him, and had no sense of his presence, and was living without God, and without Christ, and without hope, there was a subterranean work going on as necessary for my everlasting well-being as that Christ should die upon the cross; and God was in the counting-house, and in the exchange, and in the world, though we knew it not." We have been laid up perhaps by sickness: we have been left alone with the fevered brow and the hurried heart, our spirit hovering between the body it would fain remain in, and the home it would fain go to, as if uncertain which side to incline to; we felt only pain, we saw nothing but wrath, and we had not learned to appreciate or to understand the mystery that often lies hid in the sick-room; we felt, if we thought of religion at all, "God has forsaken us, and our God has forgotten us:" but we discover after many days that God was nearer that sick-room than the holiest cathedral, church, or chapel in Europe; that there was more of God in that loneliness than ever was in the crowded assembly; and that though no tribulation for the present seemeth joyous, but rather grievous, yet we did learn lessons

in the sick-room which we were not conscious of at the time, and the influence, and the sweetness, and the blessedness of these have lasted for many days; and we feel that God was where the hard stone pillow lay, although we knew it not.

In great and painful losses and bereavements God may be, though we know it not. Nothing seems to us more like an unqualified judgment, an untempered cup of bitterness, than the darkening of a bright fireside, and the creation of a blank that never can be filled up in this world. Why this loss here? why that bereavement there? It is inexplicable to us; it seems all pain, all sadness, and all sorrow, and we cannot understand it. "Accidents," one says; "Chance," another says: both are equal nonsense. We believe in God the Father Almighty; we do not believe in chance, as the creator or governor of a single atom in heaven or in earth. The only solution is, all things work for good to them that love God; and hence one thought is always applicable, "What I do thou knowest not now"—how true is that! "Thou knowest not now," and it is not expedient you should; "but," beautifully it is added, "thou shalt know hereafter." No doubt, when we stand on the margin of the realms of the blessed, and see lighted up with all the splendour of noonday our past history, we shall see that the most intricate windings of life's labyrinth were essential parts and contributions to our eternal joy; and that those very nooks and turnings which we could neither unravel, nor understand, nor explain, were some of them the most precious messengers

from heaven to ripen the earth for God, and to quicken our pace to everlasting glory. And at least we know this, that when God takes away those we love, who are truly his people, truly believers, it is not all dark while we look into the tomb in which we have deposited the dead dust—that humiliating thought, like Abraham’s Sarah, we must bury out of sight—if we feel that in this grave the Son of God lay; and when we can lift up our eyes to the everlasting hills, and hear the words of life, and see the forms of glory, and feel that the departed has only left the cold dank crypt, in which we have been worshipping with stammering lips below, and has just entered into the glorious, sunlit cathedral, where all is bright and blessed, and the only sad thing is that the door shuts behind the entrance and leaves us here—when we are impressed and filled with these precious thoughts, we can exclaim, even at the grave’s mouth, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” and see that in the saddest wrecks, and in the greatest losses, and in the most painful trials, when we thought all was against us, and we were utterly forgotten, that the Lord was in the midst of us, though we knew it not.

The Lord has been often within the walls of many a lowly sanctuary, though we knew it not. Can you trace to one sacred place, and to the ministry there, some quickening thought, some awakening sympathy? Have you been aroused from apathy, stirred to think, to fear, to read, to pray? Has not living religion risen some Sunday morning upon your hearts like the light of morn o’er eastern lands,

and does it shine still? Has a deep sense of the shortness of time, the immensity of eternity, the responsibilities of the soul, broken in upon the shores of your heart, and washes them still? Have you been driven sometimes to ask the most urgent of all questions, "What shall it profit me if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul?" Have you ever, within the walls of the sanctuary, been tempted to ask earnestly from the heart, "What must I do to be saved?" If so, you thought you were listening to a preacher, and that you saw only man; but the Lord was there, whispering or speaking to your heart, though you knew it not. Or have you come to your sanctuary weary, worn out, tired, having found earth's cisterns insipid, and its joys disappointing? Have you come seeking a refuge, a shelter, and living bread and living water; and have you drunk from springs that were here unseen? Have you found wells in the valley of Baca? Has the Lord, who has the key of David, and opens, and no man shuts, and shuts, and no man opens, opened for you? Have you gone forth from the sanctuary into the world's wide desert like the patriarch from his sleep upon his stony pillow, refreshed, invigorated, and strengthened? Then the Lord was there, and met you, whether you knew it or not. And inexplicable it would be if he were not here. The strange thing is, not that God should be here, but that God should not be here. His own pledge and promise is, "Where two or three are met in my name, there am I in the midst of them." If you have found blessings in God's house—if

your hearts have been subdued, and your minds enlightened — if prejudices have been scattered, difficulties solved, fears laid, then that lowly sanctuary must be very dear to you. The true consecration of a church is the good we have got in it; and when we have reaped good in a place of worship, it has a charm, a consecration, a glory, an interest, that none of this world's magnificent fanes ever can possess in our estimation. Have you come murmuring, and been comforted; weary, and been refreshed; weak, and been made strong? Then it was the Lord in this place, though you knew it not. But how do we account for persons not knowing such a presence? Our proneness is incessant to attribute to human sources what is due only to a divine one. Is it not a curious phenomenon in man, that when anything befalls him, whether it be good or bad, if he can find out a human explanation of it, he will never take the divine one? We ought not to refuse human explanations, nor ought we to omit means; but still there is, and may be, a tendency, excessive in its nature, to find out a human solution for what there is wholly and only a divine one. A common reason why we do not know God when he is in this place is, our judging so much after the senses. We think the presence of God, like that of a queen, must have around it pomp, and circumstance, and material splendour. It is not so. God was not in the earthquake, nor in the strong wind, nor in the fire, but he was in the still small voice. The most silent processes of nature, we all know, are the mightiest; and God is in the

growing of a leaf of grass as intensely as he is in the arrangement of the orbs of the sky; and often in those processes that are most silent, God's presence is most real. But we think there must be noise at his presence—the earthquake, the strong wind; and because these are not heard, we imagine God is not present. We also manifest a tendency to estimate a gift or a blessing by its present effect. We think if God be with us, that the dispensation must always be joyful. But this is wrong. The most precious medicines have often the most nauseous taste. The greatest boons that God bestows for the present may not be joyous, but rather grievous. We must not say "God is not here," because our feelings are sad, or what we feel is painful; we must learn that if we seek him, and rest on him, and look for him, he will be present, even though we know it not.

When all the Sabbaths of earth are merged in the eternal one, and all sanctuaries built with hands in that city where "I saw no temple, but the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were the light thereof," may we be found, no more worshippers without the veil, but within, in that holy and happy group who are clad no longer in the clinging rags of mortality, but in white robes, having washed them and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

CHAPTER V.

A LIFE AND ITS LESSONS.

“There is a power,
Unseen, that rules the illimitable world;
That guides its motions, from the brightest star
To the least dust of this sin-tainted mould;
While man, who madly deems himself the lord
Of all, is naught but weakness and dependence.”

“God sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: to bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom.” — Ps. cv. 17—22.

THE words of David are a short *resumé* of the leading traits in the character and history of Joseph. There are precious lessons to be gathered by way of inference from the varied changes and facts of that biography. We have seen him in the depths of his depression, and we now see him elevated, in the providence of God, to the very highest position to which a subject could be raised. Pharaoh alone is on the throne, and next to him is Joseph, his prime-minister.

Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning. There is not a fact in the Old Testament history that has not its echo still in

the history of living mankind ; there is not a personage in the history of the past, whose biography is recorded in this Book, that does not exercise at this moment, through that character, an influence on the world of some kind. Hearts that are now still beneath the green turf have transmitted pulsations which will not cease till they mingle in the knell of the judgment-trumpet. They, being dead, still speak in their biographies to all mankind.

There are many very obvious lessons to be deduced from the varied changes in the history of this ancient patriarch, which may be instructive, if patiently pondered, and blessed at the same time by the Holy Spirit of God. We learn first of all, from the history of Joseph, that through much tribulation we must, all of us—for it is the universal law—enter into the kingdom of God. That tribulation may vary in its severity or in its length ; but tribulation of some sort, and of no light amount, every man must drink from his cup before he enters into those joys that are at God's right hand, and into those pleasures that are for ever. The history of the Christian Church is more or less a martyrology. The most distinguished saints have been, in past generations, generally the greatest sufferers. History has no chapter for the obscure ; yet there have been great sufferers where there is no record left to register their sufferings. The inner struggle of the soul God only writes. The martyrs had to wage war—long and severe, but unseen—with their own spirits, before they waged it with the world. Those ancient martyrs had each in secret

to lay down his own passions and his own prejudices, before he laid down his own life. Martyrdom is endured less by a death heroically met, and more by a life nobly and sublimely led. There may be martyrs where there have been no faggot, nor flame, nor ashes, left behind as their memorials. Joseph was a martyr, for he was a sufferer for righteousness' sake, and for no fault of his own. But all true believers are more or less martyrs, not by choice but of necessity. We read in the Hebrews, "Let us run the race *set before us*." God assigns the race; he sets the racer in it; we are not responsible for its length, or its roughness, or its crookedness, or its storms; we are responsible only for the spirit with which we enter it, and for the energy with which we run to reach the goal. Through tribulation, we have learned from the history of Joseph, we must enter into the kingdom of God.

But we may learn from Joseph's history, that all Christian life is not weeping. Joseph had his nights of sufferings, but he had also his days of brightness and of joy. His life was the April day—it had smiles and tears; whether the smiles or tears most preponderated, it is now needless to discuss. He was sold by his brethren, tempted by his superior, and then consigned to a miserable dungeon; but as we watch the prisoner in his dungeon, we can see how the Christianity that he professed could compensate for the outer darkness by its inner splendours. Rays of light shot through the prison-bars, that, like consecrated missionaries, told him that the eye of his heavenly Father was upon

him, and reminded him that no thickness of prison-walls is a separation from Him who has said, "I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee." Joseph learned that the long-suffering of the Lord is not apathy, as we sometimes think, but salvation, as Peter has said.

Joseph learned and exemplified, in the worst of circumstances, that there was no room for despair; and that in the best and brightest of circumstances there was no room for presumption. His character was beautifully proportioned, whether we see him in the prison, or follow him amid the halls and splendours of a palace. Joseph is proof enough that it is not the home that makes the man; it is the man that makes the home. The inmate's heart determines whether a palace shall be a pandemonium, or a prison shall be a very paradise. Let the inner man be put right in its relationships to God, and all outer things arrange themselves in beautiful array, and the desert itself rejoices and blossoms, even as the rose. In that prison, hope animated and sustained Joseph. He never gave up all for lost; he believed in God — therefore he did not believe in despair. And when he was raised from that prison, and placed next to Pharaoh amid the glories of a palace, he found it, no doubt, more difficult to live divinely in a palace than submissively in a prison. No doubt he found that the slippery places, in the neighbourhood of the throne, were far more perilous than the dark places of the dungeon in which the cruelty of Pharaoh had laid him. But still, anywhere, and everywhere, and al-



ways, Joseph seems to have maintained an equanimity of temper that was not of nature but of grace. Have we his mantle? Are we, not stoics, insensible to outer things, but Christians, who can triumph over outer things?

There is an impressive power in real religion, which strikes and tells upon the most sceptical and unbelieving. Butler, and baker, and prince, all saw in Joseph an influence that was more than human, a character that was not the creation of diplomacy, or management, or superinduced by outer circumstances of any sort. And yet in Joseph's religion there was no ostentation, no parade. He did not talk religion, instead of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with his God; it was what he did and was that made itself felt. What a Christian *is*, tells more upon the mass of mankind than what a Christian *says*, or even *does*. The silent mission of a holy character is the most magnificent and impressive thing under the whole heaven of God. True religion beats in the heart, breathes from the life, shapes the character, and balances it; and the men of the world must see it—they cannot help themselves. The Decalogue in stone is not so impressive a thing as the Decalogue in flesh and blood. The ten commandments written on the wall may be very beautiful, but the ten commandments lived, and engraven on the living tables of the conduct, are more impressive still. God inspired Paul to write epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Philippians; but God still inspires better epistles than these—living epistles,

seen, and read, and known of all men; written, not with pen and ink, but by the Holy Ghost himself. Joseph was one of these epistles, flung like the sibyl's leaves upon the winds: and Egyptian, heathen, Christian, cannot help deciphering them. Men who will not read your Bibles, will read your conduct. Those on the Royal Exchange, who will not come to hear your minister, will hear you, and judge of what your minister is, and what he says, by what his people are, and by what they do. There is, too, in that spontaneous or involuntary influence which comes from a consistent life, a most impressive, because an unsuspected, influence and power. Let us seek to be such epistles; and, like Joseph, to make the world know we are Christians—not by signboard or placard, not by long prayers, nor by seeming unto men to fast, nor by broad phylacteries, nor by a peculiar look or whining tone; but by a consistent conduct, like that of Joseph, showing all the simplicity of a child, all the courage of a hero, all the holiness of a saint of God.

True religion fits every place, and is practicable anywhere. Our religion is not sectarian; it is catholic—that is, it is fit for all places, for all countries, for all climes. It can grow in a dungeon; it can bloom in a palace. Amid the frosts of Labrador, or on the burning sands of Senegal, our religion, like the tree of life, can bear its fruits for the healing of the nations. In the deepest dungeon, if we cannot work, we can at least pray; and, in the darkest cell, God sees the folded hands, the bowed head, and hears the beating heart, and sees the adoring soul,

and enters the name of such in the Book of Life, while he nourishes their aspirations after heaven with heavenly manna and with living bread.

Pharaoh recognised, in the piety of Joseph, the qualification in its place and measure for a prime-minister and a great statesman. It is not true that the best Christian must prove, the instant you choose to promote him, the best prime-minister—that would be fanaticism; but it is true, that if there be two men equally qualified for the highest office in the State, by political, scientific, financial, and national information, the better Christian will be the better statesman or prime-minister; because he has the elements of integrity and honesty, and the constant sense over all he is, and all he does, schemes, or originates, “Thou God seest me.” A Christian statesman will deliberate and act more religiously than a worldly statesman prays. There is a praying in which there is no religion; and there is an acting in which there is no worldliness. One has occasionally heard a conversation where God’s name and religion occurred in every second or third sentence, and it was plain there was no religion there at all; one has heard a conversation in which the name of God and Christ was not mentioned, and it was profoundly religious from first to last. It is the tone, temperament, and principle that run through what men say and do, that determine what their words mean, and what their conduct is also. Pharaoh saw in Joseph that consistency of conduct, that sterling integrity, and, according to the record here, so clearly the evidence of God being with him,

that he selected for his premier a man who had shown such judgment, such forbearance, such charity, such kindness, such absence of everything like malice, hatred, or ill-will; he saw in the whole of that character, so beautifully balanced, the raw material at least of a good Egyptian statesman, and he had the rare wisdom to recognise it. A king, a prince, or an emperor may show genius in choosing great men, as well as in doing great acts; it requires as much genius to take good advice as it does to give it, and often much more Christianity to take good advice than to give it. Even the very heathen could see in Joseph something that showed a firm, consistent, and noble character. And so it is still. The outer world can see the outer morality of a Christian, while it cannot understand the inner springs of his conduct. The world cannot see the holy heart which, like a censer, is filled with divine fire; but the world can feel the celestial warmth which it transmits without. Morality is not a segment of Christianity; it is the very substance of Christianity. There may be a morality without religion; but there cannot be a religion, worthy of the name, without originating all things that are just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report.

A Christian may take office under the State, and the highest office if it be presented to him. This seems a truism; and yet there is a sect who say it is sinful to become a lawyer, a physician, a member of parliament. They wish to live as if this were a theocracy: and if they could show that manna is rained from heaven, and that we do not need the

vulgar appliances of sowing and reaping — if they could show that men are fed without labour, then they would be right. But to entertain the idea that a Christian may not be a statesman, is to give up the world to the devil, and admit that he is lawful lord of it, and that we concede his sovereignty over the whole of it. It does seem that for a Christian to reject power where it is offered, is undutiful. For a person to turn power to evil is most unchristian and unholy; but to make our possession of power subservient to the glory of God, the good of our country, the benefit of mankind, is surely worthy of a Christian; and we pray that many Christians may be found to do it. The monk leaves the world because he is afraid of its sins; his brother, the suicide, leaves the world because he is sick of its troubles; and the sensualist plunges into the world because he is enamoured of its sins and sensual indulgences: but the Christian accepts the world from God — takes the place that providence assigns him — rises above the world by the grace that is given him; and, while rendering unto Cæsar, Cæsar's things, he renders unto God the things that are God's; and *in* the world, doing its every day duties, he is not *of* the world — he has his heart and his treasure high and far beyond.

Joseph was not ashamed of his religion; true, he did not parade it; but when proper occasions came, as when called upon by Pharaoh, or the butler, or the baker, to interpret their respective dreams, he did not hesitate to say what he was, and whom he served; he did not display his religion, nor did he

quarrel about it, but most assuredly he loved it, and on proper occasions he manfully and firmly avowed it. He left his religion to be detected by its influence without, rather than to be heard as a boast upon the lips. He would neither ostentatiously sound a trumpet to let the world know what he was, nor would he, like a coward, hide his light under a bushel to conceal what he was. If we are Christians, it will be felt that we are; if we be not, we need not tell the world that we are, for they will see that we are not.

Joseph on no occasion, while acknowledging God's providential government, marvelled or repined at what he experienced. He did not say, with many now-a-days, "Ah! if I had not made this change, then I should not have suffered this;" but he felt that having taken the Gospel as his hope, he must take up his cross and follow him who was his Master. In modern days, when a Jew becomes a Christian, or a Roman Catholic a Protestant, you will hear complaints of what they endure; but very often we blame religion for the sufferings which we have provoked upon our own heads. We must always remember that violence is not piety, that troublesome quarrelling is not contending for the faith, that rudeness to man is not faithfulness to God. Very often the ills that we ascribe to religion are brought upon ourselves by our own folly. There are men who think slovenliness and idleness the attributes of genius, and when they suffer from their inattention to the proprieties of life, they excuse themselves because they are men of genius. Where-

ever there is the highest genius, there will generally be the soundest judgment; we are not to attribute to genius what we suffer for our own imprudence; and must not attribute to religion what we suffer for our own want of common sense. Joseph did not complain of what he suffered, though his religion was really the cause or occasion of it; but he bore it patiently, and waited for God's time to emancipate and deliver him.

Joseph's life up to this point is a comment upon this text, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all else shall be added." How remarkably was it evolved in the whole character and conduct of Joseph! He did not say, Will this free me? Will this honour me? Will this profit me? But evidently his first inquiry was, Is this consonant to the mind of God, and consistent with the obligations of a Christian? And by thus having a central, regulating spring, never exhausted of its power, always operating, everywhere present, his face was ever in the right direction; like a ship under right discipline, even when it seems to be losing way, it is really gaining, till it reaches its destined haven. He sought first God's kingdom, and His righteousness; and having found what was duty, he had no more thought about what he should eat, or put on. It is one of the most delightful things, and one of the most expedient—yes, one of the richest luxuries, to be able to say, Now I see this is clearly my duty; and seeing this, I fling every anxiety and thought to the winds. Let us go right onward in the groove of duty, and everything will

fall in to help us. If we take side ends, and follow crooked purposes, and act from evil motives, we cannot expect that anything will follow but disaster.

Joseph sought God's kingdom first. And this prescription is not yet obsolete; it is as fresh and seasonable to-day as it was three or four thousand years ago. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," was a maxim clearly illustrated in the life of Joseph. Where was then the highest wisdom? Not among the magi, who worshipped the sun; but in the man who believed in God, and received his truth. It is still under the highest inspiration that the lowliest duties are best done. It is by celestial observations that the mariner's chart is most accurately constructed; and it is under a heavenly guidance that human life is most directly and beautifully shaped. It will ever be found, that they who feel most powerfully their obligations to God, are most sensitive to their duties towards mankind. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

It becomes us, like Joseph—for he exemplified it beautifully in his conduct—to show cheerfulness in piety even when that piety leads to suffering. If we trace the whole of his character, from the moment when he was sold as a slave to the moment when he escaped from prison, we shall find in it a quiet happiness—not the laughter that is madness, but the subdued cheerfulness which is Christian joy. And so we too should feel under all afflictions. If we be Christians, affliction in our case is not a curse; if we be not, then indeed we may be sad and sorrowful. Whatever happens to a Christian, is

modified by the fact that he is a Christian. Affliction falling upon an unbeliever is penal and punitive; falling upon God's sons, it must be regarded as paternal chastisement, and in no sense punitive. A believer may, like those in the days of the Apostles, receive his affliction with joy; he may, in the language of Scripture, "count it all joy," when he falls into divers tribulations and afflictions; for "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory; and though no tribulation for the present seemeth joyous, but rather grievous, yet it worketh out the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." The blackest cloud that hangs over us to-day, darkening all our horizon, we may contemplate with hope; and when to-morrow comes, we shall only know that the cloud was over us yesterday by the sweet flowers and the rich grass it has poured from its bosom on the earth, making its waste and desert places only more fragrant and beautiful for its transit. In suffering we may be patient; in peril courageous; in all things cheerful.

Wherever Joseph was, and whatever he was called upon to do, he spoke simple truth. If he interpreted the baker's dream, he told him without flattery, without colouring, what it meant. When he was summoned to interpret the dream of Pharaoh, when the hope of preferment might have induced an ungodly mind to colour the thing so as to please the king, he told the naked truth. So must it be with the ministers of the Gospel. We are ambassadors of Christ; our duty is to speak the

whole truth. The minister is not pledged to give sunshine; he is only pledged to give light. He is bound to speak truth, whether that truth be palatable to the hearer or not.

It was exhibited in Joseph's whole life, that he who does well the duties of one sphere, may indulge the hope that he will be elevated to a higher. Joseph did life's lowest duties well, and in the providence of God he was elevated to higher rank. The person who cannot be a good Christian servant, will not be, nor is it right that he should be, a Christian master. If it is your low position to sweep a crossing, do it well; and the Master will say, "Come up higher;" but those persons who urge, "I cannot be a Christian in this shop, or in that trade," "I cannot be a Christian in Parliament," "I cannot be a Christian in a lawyer's office," may depend upon it that if they were elsewhere, they would do worse. It is not the outer circumstances that form the inner man; it is the inner man that gives tone, and shape, and elevation to the outer circumstances in which he is placed. He who cannot discharge well the duties of the place in which he now is, would not discharge one whit better the duties of a higher, if he were raised to it. Show yourselves, then, fit for the work assigned you, and in due time you will be elevated, as being meet for the place that is higher.

Joseph did not forget himself, his God, or his end, in the magnificence of his palatial residence. Amid all the splendours and the enjoyments of a palace, we are told that he gave directions that his

bones should be borne to Palestine, and not left in Egypt. What meant that? It was the old pilgrim-longing of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, for "a city that hath foundations;" and by an earthly symbol he unfolded their aspirations after a heavenly inheritance. Joseph found that happiness did not accumulate in Egypt, any more than it does in England, in the ratio of our elevation in society. We think, in a low place, "If I were only there, how happy should I be!" and when we are there, we discover it is only the platform on which we express another wish, "If I could only be there, how happy should I be!" and then we find—what David and Joseph found—that on the highest pinnacle we are doomed only to feel, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest!" Where we think there is unmingled happiness, the sparrow on the tiles, the swallow or the martin under the eaves, the porter at the gate, are happier far than the royal inmate of a palace. It is not the glare and the gaud of circumstance that are always the symbols of happiness: true happiness is within. Joseph felt, what every true Christian feels, "This is not our rest;" and he longed, therefore, for the rest that remaineth for the people of God. And this longing after a better rest—this inability of the soul to domesticate itself in this world—this consciousness that we do not feel at home here, is only the evidence of our spirits being in harmony with all creation, which groans and travails in pain, waiting to be delivered and elevated to its destiny; and the longing we feel grace consecrates, it does

not extinguish; it is a longing that is from God, and that God will gratify.

Joseph showed, in his whole character, how personal religion can be combined with earthly and secular responsibilities. He was a Christian in prison, where he had no responsibilities; he was a Christian at Pharaoh's right hand, when his responsibilities were so many. He seems to have combined in his character the peculiarities of Martha, who was troubled about many things, and of Mary, who had chosen the better part; and these two, instead of being obstructions the one to the other, were new inspirations to the working and the busy hand. Joseph did not find his religion an obstruction, but an impulse to his business. When a man neglects his business in order to read his Bible, or when he fails in his duties to his master in order to go to pray, he has not a right knowledge of what religion is. Religion is not to interfere with the twelve hours' service you owe to your employer; but it is to inspire and direct your energies in the midst of them; and wherever religion is pleaded as a reason for indolence, disobedience, or inattention, it is either hypocrisy or ignorance. The most Christian man will be the most dutiful and devoted servant, and the more so that his is not eye-service, but a sacrifice purely rendered under a deep and ever-continuing sense, "Thou God seest me."

We have, in the whole of Joseph's history, a very impressive lesson to the young. Even in this world, bad as it is, there is a recognition, if not of spiritual religion, at least of integrity, truthfulness, faithful-

ness, diligence, obedience. The world may hate religion, but it does see that it is not workable without the graces that religion alone can nourish. This world is not a paradise, but it is not yet a pandemonium; it has many relieving lights that show that, if it has deeply fallen, it is not yet plunged into despair; and hence the young man who sets out in the world determined to do what is right and true, faithful and just, and to do it with all his might, is at least respected. To do the duty that we owe to a master is part of religion; religion is not merely praying or preaching; it is living, doing, suffering; and therefore the pious young man who sets out to show his religion by doing the duties of his office, by attending to the obligations of his service, will generally, if history speak fact, if experience prove truth, become a prosperous man. Such is the law even in this world. Here was Joseph, despised but consistent, truthful, diligent; and ultimately he sits with princes. Here are his brethren, whom he left behind, coming to him beggars for bread in the hour of famine. And if any one who has grown up to middle life will look back upon the past, he will find that his friends who were industrious and right-principled got on in some way, while those who were dishonest, indolent, and idle, came to poverty. In the case of beggars, we find, too often, when we enter minutely into their history, a result that almost quenches charity: it was indolence, want of principle, want of consistency of character, that mainly brought them to beggary. Take mankind as a whole, and it will be found that an honest

man, who fears God, and is loyal to his sovereign, will get on; whereas a man who does not, neither succeeds nor deserves success. Let young men study Joseph as an exquisite model, as a specimen of the virtues that adorn the human character, as an instance that godliness has the promise of the life that now is as well as the promise of the life to come.

In all Joseph's history what evidence have we of an ever-presiding, ever-ruling God! Not one single portion of his biography was chance. There was no drifting in his course on life's stream: he lay directly to the point which he had in view, and towards that he made progress constantly. God witnessed the slave sold, he saw him in prison, he directed the dream of Pharaoh and the interpretation of Joseph. And God is and acts the same now. It is true, not only in David's days, nor in Joseph's only, but in 1856—"If I go up to heaven, thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also. The darkness hideth not from thee. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thoughts afar off." The recesses of ancient forests, the interior of great cathedrals, the nooks and intricacies of the human heart, the windings of all men's lives, whether public or private, in the light of day, or in solitude and silence, God sees. God is, not was; God rules now as truly as he ruled when Joseph was a prisoner, or when he was prime-minister at the right hand of Pharaoh.

CHAPTER VI.

UNEXPECTED GOOD NEWS.

“But such a sacred and homefelt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never felt till now.”

“And they went up, out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob’s heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.” — GEN. xlv. 25—28.

THE perplexity that seems to have hung, like a cloud, over the history and the feelings of Jacob began to dissolve and to disappear. He saw the dawn at this moment of a brighter and a better day. A star of hope appeared in his horizon; and he felt that his last days, which threatened to be his saddest, were now likely in the providence of God to be the best and the brightest that had yet shone upon him. He said at a former period of his history, “All these things are against me.” “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me.” He now begins to see that he was mistaken, and for the first time to find that God’s own statement is the true

one, the very opposite of what he declared to be his experience; and instead of all things being against him—instead of Joseph being not, and Simeon being not, and Benjamin being taken away, all these things were working together for good to him, as they do still to all that love God, and are the called according to his purpose.

The first impression of the unexpected news that Joseph was alive, was almost too much for the aged man to bear. The tide of life, as he listened, rolled backward on his aged heart, and he “fainted,” partly from fear, and partly from excess of joy: for we are so constituted in this world, that excess of joy has as often proved fatal as excess of sorrow or grief. His feelings were chequered, his emotions alternating, the one following the other. Tears and smiles, fears and hopes, joys and sorrows, chased each other, like clouds and sunshine on an April day, in the aged man’s bosom, till his old and weary frame was almost shattered by the struggling and contending feelings produced by the possibility of the once dead Joseph being yet alive—the shepherd-boy of Israel having become almost a sovereign of the great land of Egypt.

We have here suggested an indirect proof of the perfect distinctness of the soul from its earthly and material tenement. We have no doubt of the fact; but it is always delightful to trace incidental evidences of it as we read the Bible. Here, for instance, is shown what we all constantly meet with—that a moral sentiment conveyed into the mind acts upon the body. No immaterial or mental

emotion can act upon matter. Medicine can act upon matter, that is, matter on matter; but something mental, in order to have a subject for its action, must have something mental to act upon. As certainly as opium affecting the body proves that there is corresponding matter for it to act upon, a dose of joy or grief affecting the mind must prove that there is something immaterial for it to act upon. Material things must have material substances; and there can be no explanation of this phenomenon, that a dose, as we have called it, of moral emotion, sentiment, and feeling, influences the body, except the supposition that it has an immaterial or mental medium first to influence, and through it to reach the body. Just as a dose of prussic acid taken into the body will destroy life, so a dose of joy or sorrow introduced into the mind will sometimes through the mind act upon the body, and destroy life; the first indicating a material medium upon which it operates, the second indicating an immaterial substance through which it affects the body. True, mind and body are very closely connected. We cannot say where the limits of the one cease, and where the commencement of the other begins. But mind and body, however closely connected now, are distinct from each other; and the one, as we all know, is destined to outlive the other.

The news that Israel or Jacob heard from his sons, when they returned, was that Joseph was alive. This must have seemed to him, as indeed he felt it, a very startling announcement. "How can he be alive? I received irresistible presumptive evidence

that he was torn by wild beasts. I saw his very robe stained with blood. All my sons declared and testified that he was destroyed by wild beasts. Has he risen from the dead? Is it a *delusio visus* on the part of my children? Is it some person who has pretended to be Joseph? Is it possible that Joseph can be alive? And yet, if he be not alive, what mean these waggons? what mean my sons? They cannot by this statement desire to bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. They would not dare to taunt, to tantalise, or to vex me. Therefore, I must believe that Joseph is alive."

And not only did he hear that Joseph was alive, but he heard, too, that he was appointed to dignity in Egypt—that he was at the right hand of Pharaoh—that a king's wealth and resources were at Joseph's disposal. How wonderful are God's doings! His ways are past finding out. Israel, as he first heard the tidings, fainted; but when he saw some of the presumptive proofs that they were true, his spirit revived, and he exclaimed in the excitement and joy of his emotions, "It is enough. My deepest sorrows are now stanchèd, my greatest grief upon earth is now removed; life's last bitterness is healed, the only joy that I ever desired, God has poured into my heart. It is enough. Goodness and mercy, in spite of all my murmurings, have followed me all the days of my life. I can now leave the world gladly, if I can only once more see Joseph before I die. My cup runneth over. Rise speedily, to-morrow's sun, upon the brightest day of my pilgrimage, and let me go and see Joseph, Rachel's son, before I die!"

The aged patriarch determined to go and see his son, old and weary as he was, before he died. All the corn in Egypt once was not sufficient to induce him to leave Palestine; he then sent his sons: for he was too old, too weak and worn out to go himself. But when he heard that there was not merely corn in Egypt, but that Joseph his son was now a governor there, he felt new elasticity pervade every limb; joy in the heart gives vigour and vitality to all his powers; distance that seemed once so great, now seems very short; and he who could wait seven years for Rachel for the love that he bore her, and see these seven years as but seven days, can now traverse all the distance that separates him from Joseph, and feel mountains sink, and plains exalted, and broad streams grow narrow, and no depth so deep that love's feet could not wade it, and no chasm so broad that affection's wing could not cross it. "It is enough: I will go, old as I am, and see Joseph my son before I die."

Thus we gather the history of the impression made upon aged Israel by the good tidings; and his own purpose, in spite of the weight of many years, to go and see that son whose loss he had so long, and so poignantly mourned. Now, are there any lessons that we may derive from this interesting and beautiful incident, so beautiful in its own untouched and unadorned simplicity? There are. We read that there is joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth. We read of one who said, "This my son was dead, and is alive; was lost, and is found." And we, too,

should feel something of the emotion over a recovered and quickened sinner, which the patriarch Israel felt over his restored and recovered Joseph. We are told that by nature we are dead in trespasses and in sins; and if it be matter of joy that one dead is now made alive, how much more that one dead in sins—the real death, for the other is not death, but the shadow of death—is again made alive unto God, and a victim of Satan made a trophy of the Redeemer? As we hear of one after another awakening to the hopes of the Gospel, accepting the great Redeemer as the only Redeemer, we ought to reflect the joy of Him who for the joy set before him endured the cross; we ought to sympathise with the feelings of Him who, it is said, shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. And to hear of one lost sinner become a decided Christian, ought to be to us intenser joy than to hear of new fields of gold, new discoveries in science, new prosperity to a nation, new social and economical blessings to all mankind. If we have no sense of such joy, we give but faint evidence that we ourselves are alive unto God. But when that recovered one—that son who was lost, and is now found—who was dead, and is now alive, is our own son, our daughter, our own husband, our own wife, it ought to be a joy, as well as a gratitude, in comparison of which that of the patriarch was almost like sorrow. Can there be any joy to a Christian greater than this, that a member of his own household has become a member of Christ—that a new birth has taken place there, whose anniversary shall ever

recur in everlasting ages—that an adoption has taken place, in comparison of which the adoption of a slave to the dignity of a king's son is worthless? All dignities and rank in comparison of this are as nothing. Crowns must fade, thrones must crumble, and dignities must decay; but the dignity of being sons of God will last whilst there is a God to be praised, and hearts to praise him. Let us then rejoice if we hear of Christ's cause spreading anywhere, and successive strangers made sons; but let that joy swell and deepen the more when we hear that the son who was lost and is found, who was dead and is alive, is intimately connected with ourselves.

But if Israel felt such joy at meeting his Joseph, and if we feel no less at seeing the sons of nature become the sons of God, how much will that joy be deepened and increased, when after life's journey is ended, torn and broken households shall recognise long-lost and severed sons, and daughters, and friends, and acquaintance? As we cross the threshold of the realms of glory, we shall find one we thought lost, saved; one we thought dead, alive; and Jacob's joy at the recovery and the sight of Joseph will be as nothing in comparison of a joy like this. What is called death is but a shadow; the real death is the death of the soul: and to hear that a soul is made alive, and to meet that soul in eternity, no longer a sufferer, but a saint before the throne, must be a joy, compared to which the patriarch's was as nothing. And when death comes in this world to such an one—to a true Christian, a

real believer—to one who walked with the pure and the holy, and whose soul was washed in the blood of the Lamb—it is not she or he that dies; it is death that dies. Death is transference, not extinction. I am the tenant; my body is the furnished house that I live in for a little; life is my lease, but eternity is my home, and heaven my endless and glorious estate. And when believers shall meet where they shall part no more, how deep and joyous will be the feeling that many a parent will give expression to, “It is enough: mine eyes have seen Christ’s salvation; and those I loved upon earth I now meet in glory; and so shall we be for ever with the Lord.”

But, it may be asked, if such meetings shall take place in the better land, will there be recognition there? Just as truly as the aged Jacob recognised Joseph, from whom he had been so long severed, will Christian recognise Christian amid the pure light of everlasting day. And that recognition will not only be after the resurrection, of which there is no doubt, but prior to the resurrection also. Angel knows angel. The bodily eye can now only distinguish bodily features; but when this tabernacle is dissolved, why should not spirit recognise spirit? There is in every man’s soul a thing called individuality. There is in every person a peculiarity marked and distinct, which shows itself in his features, his style, his manner, his address. Those things that we call the features, are but the outward exponents and evidences of the man. Take twenty thousand faces, and you find there are none that are not per-

fectly distinct from each other. Not the least wonderful thing in the world, and that which gives the loftiest notions of the magnificence of the human soul, is the infinite variety of the human face. There are no two faces that are the fac-similes of each other. It is not the varied physical structure of the countenance that differs—the face is modified by the inhabitant that looks through it: it is the play of the soul upon the countenance that gives it its infinite variety of expression. We can now see the soul only by its material and outward exponents; but when this body shall be dissolved, when the glass through which we see darkly and dimly, shall be broken, and when we live in the pure light of heaven, then, soul will recognise soul, and spirit will recognise spirit, each retaining its individuality in all its sharpness of outline, but shining in light and full of glory. And when the resurrection-day come, and the body shall be raised again to be united to the soul, surely, if after thirty years, the aged Jacob with his dim eye could still recognise Rachel's son, we may expect that we shall be able to recognise those who are raised in the very bodies in which they fell. The resurrection is not the giving of a new body, but the resurrection of the old. True, as it is urged, the body changes every seven years: yet the Joseph of thirty years ago was recognised by Jacob as a son still. There are certain stamina or main outlines that remain in every man, and that distinguish him from boyhood to old age itself. And when this mortal shall, not be exchanged for another, but shall have put on immortality—and

when this corruptible shall, not have been superseded by an incorruptible, but shall have put on incorruption—when death shall be swallowed up in victory, then broken families will be reunited; and all that fell asleep in Jesus, and were recognised before they fell asleep, shall also recognise and be recognised after they have risen, and are present with the Lamb. Shall we not have recollection in our future nature? Memory is a part of our being. Can we suppose that memory will be filled with the images of those we love, and that we shall be ever recollecting them, and never seeing them? We must surely rather feel that the images which we cherished on earth shall be superseded only by the realities we meet in heaven. We cannot suppose that we shall ever recollect, but never see them we recollect. “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring him.” What would be the consolation to a Christian mourning over a lost child? That this child, sleeping in Christ, Christ will bring with him. The consolation is, not that Christ will come, which the Apostle has stated; but the added consolation, that we shall meet, recognise, and know those that are risen in Christ, and that Christ brings with him. Thus, as the patriarch Jacob recognised Joseph after a long period of estrangement and separation, so—not from this analogy, as if it were able to bear the whole stress of the inference, but from other por-

tions of Scripture we need not now quote — there will not only be meeting of long severed relatives and friends in our Father's house, but there will also be recognition of each other; like the Israelites in Canaan, we shall remember all the way that God led us, and recount its perils, and remember that the things which seemed so trivial in our history, were many of them the turning points of our eternal well-being.

We discover from this beautiful narrative, that every step which Joseph took, to the moment he disclosed himself as that very Joseph, was a gradual preparation of his brethren and his father for the revelation he was to make. If Joseph had disclosed himself at one burst in all his greatness — supposed by his brethren, and still more by his father, to be dead — they could not have borne it. His whole effort, therefore, was to prepare his father and his brethren for this remarkable disclosure of himself. So all that Christ is doing with us upon earth is preparing us for the manifestation of himself. He says, he has gone to prepare a place for us; and as sure as he is preparing a place for us, he is as busy preparing us for that place. In our present state we could not bear the full apocalypse of his glory. The Apostle Paul, we are told, was taken to heaven, and there he saw sights that struck him dumb, and a glory that his eloquent tongue could not express. So these old vessels of ours could not endure the new wine of our Father's kingdom: we need to be seasoned and prepared for it. All this life's discipline is a preparation to see the true Joseph, whom

to know is eternal life, and whom to see and love is heaven and happiness for ever. And are we not ourselves, if we be Christians, conscious of progress? Are we not, if believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, sensible that we are the subjects of a preparatory discipline, that is ripening and preparing us for heaven, and for happiness? Are not the perplexities of yesterday the plain things of to-day? Do not difficulties that once puzzled us, now begin to disappear before the influx of the brightening dawn? Do we not feel, if true Christians, and at all advanced in life, earth becoming more strange, the present more foreign, and the future more homelike in its aspect and relationships? And if many of those who were connected with us have preceded us to that future land, and crossed the sea from this far-off island to the great continent of the blessed, do we not feel this world ceasing to be home; and in proportion as it ceases to be so, the other and the better world putting on a more homelike aspect? All this is only the preparation of our souls for the sight of Jesus, just as all Joseph's dealings with his aged father and brethren were their preparation for the manifestation of himself.

And often we shall find too, like the patriarch, that in our old age God's manifestation of himself is brightest and best. We are not to put off thoughts about God to old age. Why should we? We ought not to put off happiness. Why should we postpone being at peace with God, and with all mankind? The very end and object of religion is to make us happy. We never can be happy without it; we

cannot but be happy if we really know it. But yet, in old age, the believer has often found that God makes the brightest manifestation of himself. At evening-time it is often light. Before we enter the realms of the blessed, God gives us the richest earnest, and sweetest foretaste of the glory that is to be revealed. John, the writer of the Apocalypse, was an old man in a solitary chamber on a rock washed by the *Ægean* Sea, when he saw more of his Master, and of heaven, and of the splendours of the New Jerusalem, than prophet's eye had ever seen, or Apostle's heart had ever conceived; and Simeon was upon the eve of his departure from the present world, when his eyes, dim with the mists of age, saw Jesus; and the instant he had seen that sight, his last sight being his brightest, his old age tasting a sweet cup that youth had been denied, he exclaimed in the joy and ecstasy of his heart, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Thus his death was not a struggle, but a euthanasia, happy and triumphant; and he died, having seen the Lord's Christ: death died, not he. It was thus with the patriarch Israel. His last moments were his brightest. His heart had been breaking for thirty years; it began to beat with new joy, as he was about to bid adieu to life's long struggles, and to enter that rest where he and all the wanderers of the desert that fell asleep in the same blessed hope, have met together to part no more.

But when Jacob doubted, at first, as if the news were too good to be true, that Joseph was alive,

they showed him the changes of raiment, and the waggons or carriages that were sent in order to transport them to that distant land; and when he saw these, it is said, his heart, which had fainted before under the load of conflicting emotions, began instantly to revive. Now, does God ever give his people upon earth anything to sustain their faith when it begins to faint, and their hope when it threatens to fail? Perfect faith is as impossible upon earth as perfect character. There is no faith that has not around it and in it much distrust; there is no character that has not in it flaws. In fact, in this world gold needs alloy to be workable. Character seems to need defect to be able to exist here. The instant it ceases to have any defect, it is in heaven; its currency is no longer upon earth, but in the world to come. There is no such state on earth as perfect trust and confidence in God. But does not God give us what he gave in his providence to Jacob, proofs that all is true? Have we not sure words of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place? Do we not hear promises, like celestial music from the skies, telling us of a better land, and of the certainty of our arriving there? And are we not conscious, if Christians, of earnest and foretastes in our own hearts of the rest that remaineth for the people of God? It is said that voyagers to some beautiful isles in warmer climes, scent the aroma of their flowers while they are twenty or thirty miles far off at sea: it seems as if God permitted his people, the nearer they approach the haven of per-

p  t  al peace, to have a more joyous earnest and foretaste of the glory that is to be revealed. We have presentiments within us that are sure as prophecies; we have earnestness in our hearts that are pledges and evidences of the glory to come, and of the certainty of our admission into it. Thanks be to God that he not only gives us his Word, his promise, and his oath, but heaven also within us, before he gives us to be in heaven. In this world joy enters into us as a foretaste; in that world we enter into joy as the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Jacob hoped to see Joseph before he died: we expect to see our departed ones after we die; though, whether in his case or in ours, death be one of the most certain things, it is yet one of those things that all men believe, and few personally seem to anticipate. "Thou shalt die," was spoken in Paradise, and it has been fulfilled ever since. This prophecy carries in its own hand its awful credentials: no man can doubt or deny its fulfilment. Its reverberations are in all the ages and centuries of the world; and living and buried generations equally attest, "Thy word, Thou shalt die, O God, is truth." But we shut it out; we try to ward off the thought of it; and perhaps it is well not to think of death, provided you are thinking of what is beyond it, and what is the best and only preparation for triumph over it. But there are times when we cannot do otherwise. In sickness, or at seventy years of age, we cannot help thinking of it. Its fore-shadows on the eye, the feebleness beginning to be

felt in the limbs, and the whitening hair, all tell us that man is on his way to his long home; and he hears himself these words, "Thou shalt die," like the curfew bell, at the close of life's day, telling him that all human passions must now be quenched, and that he must prepare, like Israel, to meet his God. But what is death to a believer? It is a little quickening of the pulse, a little tightening of the breath, and a yielding of the body to the material laws under which it lives. But that is not I. The body is not I, but merely the house that I live in. The heathen could say, "Man perishes;" but the Christian can say, "Though the outward man perishes, yet the true, inward man is renewed day by day." Death is not a departure from life: it is a departure to life. A Christian, therefore, should look to death, not as his end, but as the last and longest step that he takes in his pilgrimage, when at one bound he passes from time to eternity, from the throne of grace to the judgment-seat of God. And what therefore we are chiefly to think about, when we reflect upon dying, is, Have we found the only Saviour? Are we resting upon his perfect sacrifice? Are we clothed in his glorious righteousness? Are we sure that we are his? And if so, then neither life nor death shall separate us from him. The fact is, death is not near so solemn as life. Men often say, it is a very solemn thing to die; but it is a vastly more solemn thing to live; and if you take care to live as a Christian should, you need never trouble yourselves about dying. Think about present duty, present responsibility,

present living, and you may leave future dying, with all its issues, to Him who has taken its sting from death, and its victory from the grave. And what a blessed thought it is, that when we die, as the patriarchs died, we pass at once, if believers, to the presence, not of Joseph, but of Him of whom Joseph was a dim and shadowy type, even Jesus! When the patriarch heard that Joseph was alive, he had a long and weary journey to undertake, lightened it is true by the royal and magnificent provision of Pharaoh. But there is no long journey to us, still less what the Fathers of the Council of Trent regarded as an expiatory place between—a Purgatory, where we must suffer for a season before we get to heaven. All Scripture tells us, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; for they”—not suffer, but—“rest from their labours.” And the Apostle Paul says that “absent from the body” is “present” instantly “with the Lord.” And our Blessed Redeemer says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions;” and he adds, “if it were not so, I would have told you.” If there were a purgatory between earth and heaven, would not He who has revealed the beginning and the end, have told us the interval between? His very silence is the evidence that Paul spoke what is soberness and truth, when he said, “I know that if this earthly tabernacle be dissolved, we have an house of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Surely it must be to a member of the Church of Rome a most miserable thing to die, even if as a member of that great apostasy he be a sincere recipient of

all the absolution that priests can give, and have done all the penances that flesh and blood can endure : for after he has been baptised, confirmed, absolved, anointed, and gone through all the processes of priestly treatment, he cannot look to the future as a converted Christian only can, since he feels that he has to go through a place thus defined by the catechism of the Council of Trent:—"There is a purgatorial fire in which the souls of the faithful, that is, true believers, are tormented, and by which they expiate their sins for a season." We need no purgatory hereafter; we have one without pain now. What is our purgatory? "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son purgeth or cleanseth from all sin"—sins of omission, sins of commission, sins of thought, and sins of deed—venial sins, if such there be, and mortal sins, if such others can be called—that blood "cleanseth from all sin;" and he who is washed in it, and has made his garments clean, knows that sudden death is sudden glory; and that the instant he is absent from the body, he is in Abraham's, or rather in Jesus' bosom; and so shall be for ever with the Lord.

We have not viewed Joseph as a type; because we have gathered the lessons all along from his history, which seem naturally to flow from the intensely interesting incidents of his biography; but a greater than Joseph is here. Jacob saw Jesus before he died, as well as his beloved son Joseph; and Simeon said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Can we see Christ? Yes. "Whom having not seen, we love; and in whom, though now we

see him not, yet," what is as good, "believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith is to the inner man what the eye is to the outer; and this faith in the inner man sees the unseen, just as the eye in the outer man sees the material and the visible. But where can we see Christ? We have a perfect portrait of Jesus in his own blessed and inspired Word. We know what Christ is, because he is delineated by himself. We have his autograph in his own holy Word. We do not want a carpenter to hew it out of wood, or a silversmith to chase it upon precious metal, or a sculptor to cut it in stone; we have it in the original, in that blessed book the Bible. The record of His death is our true and only crucifix. I may gaze intently upon Christ as he is portrayed here; I may do everything except worship it. I must look above the portrait in order to worship; for even the portrait that he himself has given, I may not worship: I must worship the original only. And if the only autograph-portrait that Jesus has left of himself, his own blessed Word, I may not worship, how much less may I dare to worship images of him that are made by human hands? But Scripture is not only his own portrait, it is his oracle. He speaks to me here as an elder brother to a brother. He speaks to me in as touching accents as ever Joseph spoke to his brethren. He tells me what I am, what I am to do, what I may be, what he has done for me; and he tells me, above all, in this Book, that I have not a salvation

to elaborate, but to accept; that I have not something to pay that I may be pardoned, but that I am pardoned on accepting freely the pardon that he offers with his own hand to every man that will. Salvation is not something that we are to do, but something done for us. It is not something that we are to finish; it is finished, and pronounced in its completeness and availableness for all. It is not something that we are to promise in the present or for the future; it is a perfect righteousness provided and complete, which I have to put on, just as the persons invited to the feast in the parable had to put on the proper robe. The robe was hung up in the hall of the house of him who invited; and when one came in without the proper robe, what did the master say to him? He simply asked, Why? Did the person answer, "I could not see or get one?" No; he knew that the reason was, he would not have one; because he thought his own rags were sufficient, and therefore he refused to take the robe provided for him; and he was speechless; and the consequence followed, he was cast out. Now, no lost sinner at the judgment-seat of Christ will be able, or more, will dare to utter a shadow of a reason why he is not what the saved and the glorified are seen to be — each will be speechless, because each will feel, "I am lost because I would not be saved; I am condemned because I would not be acquitted; I am without Christ's righteousness because I thought my own good enough. I thought my own repentance, my own works, my own sacrifices, my own sufferings, would do; and I would not believe

the preacher when he told me that salvation was so simple a thing." More men stumble at the threshold of Christianity from its intense simplicity than from any other reason upon earth. They think, "This is too simple to be true; this is too good to be true." In fact, they are exactly of the same school as he of whom we read in the second book of Kings, "Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper;" that is, "I thought that the magnificence of the result would require a corresponding elaborateness of process; but instead, he just bids me wash, and be clean. I will not believe that I can be cured by such a simple process. And, again, are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" that is, "Are my own penitential efforts, my own good deeds, to go for nothing? Are they not as good as anything in the Gospel?" "So he turned, and went away in a rage." But there is a common sense in servants sometimes wanting in masters; and at this point the servants appeared, and in the exercise of that common sense said, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? You say yourself

you would. How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" We have there a perfect picture of what man feels, when he is told what he must do to be saved. Hundreds would walk along Cheapside barefooted so many hours a day to get to heaven, provided they were allowed to carry on their sinful indulgences during the rest of the day, or on the evening that follows. Others again would pay any amount to buy heaven. The treasures of the Church of Rome are evidence of what persons will give for a supposed passport to the kingdom of heaven. But when we bid men do this simple act, "Wash, and be clean; believe and be forgiven," they go away in a rage, and say, "If he had told us to do this or that, we would have done it." But what Jesus says is, submit to be saved; not save yourselves, but consent to be saved; take, not make salvation; ask it thus, "Blessed Jesus, I am lost, ruined, undone; wash me in thy blood, which I believe to be the only expiation; justify me by thy righteousness, which I believe to be the only title." If you have ever said, or can this day say thus much, from the heart, you are justified, you are pardoned, you are a Christian. But you exclaim, "What! will not men then live as they like?" No; for such will be your sense of gratitude and love for so great glory given so simply, and for so little, that you will say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and you will go forth, and, not because it is duty, but because it is intense delight, you will do justly, and love mercy, and feel that the greatest sacrifices are light, when under-

gone not to deserve heaven, but in consequence of having heaven a free gift. And hence, a Christian works from heaven, not for heaven; he works, not as a slave, but as a son. He is saved; therefore he is sanctified. He is justified; therefore he goes forth, and does whatsoever things are pure, and just, and honest. Christ delights to welcome you; it is his office to save you. Come then —

“With all your sins against your God,
With all your sins against his laws,
With all your sins against his blood,
With all your sins against his cause—
Sins as boundless as the sea,
And wash them in Gethsemane.”

We learn from the whole of this subject, and especially from the past history of the patriarch, that there are no such things as accidents in the world. Take out one pin from any one wheel, ratchet, or crank in Joseph's, Jacob's, Simeon's, or Judah's history, and the whole had been altered. On little things hang grand revolutions; the so-called accidents of man are really the ambassadors of God. A word spoken at random has struck against thrones and upset them. There are no such phenomena as random events. The turning of a straw often decides the destiny of a nation; but God was at the turning of that straw as much as at the creation of the world itself. A God who does not unseal and seal the little springs never can control the great streams; he who is not at the beginning never can govern the end.

All that betides a Christian is for his good. Whatever befalls us—sickness, sorrow, losses, crosses, bereavements—all is for our good. To-day God quenches a star in your horizon, that you may learn to look at the Sun himself; he breaks the “broken cistern,” that you may go to the inexhaustible Fountain; he interposes, but it is always and everywhere for your good.

Let us rejoice that we have a Book that tells us that all things past, present, and to come, are ours. How delightful—that all written of Joseph is for our learning! Joseph pined in prison, and was raised to a throne, that we might get the advantage of it. Jacob sorrowed and rejoiced for our comfort. Jacob’s heart resounded with griefs and joys that its vibrations might be music to ours. Holy men wrote that we might learn the lessons that they left behind them. The whole past stretches out its ten thousand hands into the present, pronouncing benedictions upon us. The past has been that our present might be holy, that our future may be happy. Thank God, then, that these things he has caused to be done and written for our learning, on whom the ends of the world are come.

CHAPTER VII.

WAITING.

“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”—GEN. xlix. 18.

IN speaking here of the great salvation which Samson, as the descendant of the tribe of Dan, should achieve for the people, Jacob looks beyond Samson, and transmits his anticipations, hopes, and faith to that blessed era when the Great Saviour of Judah, of the descendants of Dan, and of all the tribes of Israel, should appear; “For whom,” he says, “I pant, after whom I long; the manifestation, the fruits, and the personal enjoyment of whose salvation I expect very soon to taste.” It is a common practice for the inspired penmen to state the literal event about to be unfolded, but to reveal in that literal event the background, or rather, the bright mirror of a far more beautiful and spiritual apocalypse within the horizon, and very soon to be manifested in all its perfection and splendour. The dying patriarch says, “O Lord, I know Samson will one day deliver thy people; but this deliverance will be a very unsatisfactory one: I look, and I hope and pray that thy people may look, far beyond his, and see a Saviour, in comparison of whose light Samson is as a taper soon to be extinguished; and beside whose salvation the wonderful deliverances of Samson are not even worthy to be named.”

Jacob, in the *prospect* of a Saviour said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;" Simeon, in the *sight* of a Saviour, said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And we, in the remembrance of a Saviour, say, "Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing," which is as good, "we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

It is an inquiry not yet exhausted, on which our memories may be refreshed, What is the nature of this salvation, which the dying Jacob anticipated as his; and which we, the living descendants of Abraham, by being believers in Abraham's Lord, rejoice to have known and felt? It is deliverance from the curse and the condemnation of sin. Wherever sin is, there the judgment must strike. Sin and condemnation are as inseparable in God's everlasting law, as sound and echo, light and shadow, cause and effect. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Now we have sinned. Without discussing our inheritance of Adam's sin, for it is unnecessary, we are sufficiently conscious of our own sins. We have broken the law in thought, word, and deed. The curse descends upon every breaker of that law without exception, and without limitation, or possibility of exhaustion. Highest and lowest, youngest and oldest, are all guilty; for all have sinned, and all, in the language of the Apostle, are therefore "shut up unto condemnation."

How are we delivered from this curse? Jesus

bore the sin of every believer, and exhausted the penalty which sin precedes; and therefore the believer escapes it. Jesus obeyed that law which we never did nor could obey; and therefore we are treated, standing in him, and represented by him, as having done what we should have done, and as having left nothing undone that we ought to have done. Jesus by his sufferings has endured our penalty; therefore we who believe go free. Jesus by his obedience has obeyed that infinitely distant law which we could not approach or obey; therefore we are regarded as having obeyed it. We can no more obey God's law perfectly, than we can bear and exhaust God's curse eternally and infinitely. We can neither exhaust the curse that a broken law hurls, nor obey the requirements that a perfect law exacts. But because my Representative, in whom I stand, and whom God has accepted for me, has borne the curse, I go free; and because my Representative has obeyed that law, I am regarded as having obeyed it: and therefore, and thus, I enjoy that salvation which is through Christ — deliverance from the curse, or the penalty of a broken law, and a right to the blessing as the result of a law obeyed.

¶ In the next place, this salvation comprehends, and must comprehend, deliverance; not simply from the curse of the law, and investiture with the blessings promised by the law, but also, to be satisfactory to me, deliverance from the power, pollution, presence, and overcoming strength of sin within. In other words, salvation is not simply deliverance from the outward curse that descends upon the man

who breaks the law, but from the inward power of that principle of evil that has tainted every heart to its core, and still nestles in the recesses of the souls of even the regenerated. A Christian not only wishes to escape the penalty of sin, but also the sin that precedes the penalty. He desires not only to be delivered from the consequences of sin, but from sin itself. Every one would like to escape the consequences of sin; they only who have the instinct of a new nature desire to escape that which is the prolific parent and precursor of the consequences to which sin leads. Hence, inspired by a new instinct, or, in other words, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, a Christian desires to have the roots of sin extracted from the soil and crevices of his heart, as well as to be exempted from eating its bitter fruits. Now, from and through Christ crucified he is sprinkled with that blood which saves from the curse of sin; from and through Christ exalted to a throne he receives that Holy Spirit who delivers him from the power and presence of sin. Hence, Christ crucified is his deliverance from sin's curse; Christ throned is his deliverance from sin's power. By the first he is entitled to heaven; by the second he is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; in both he enjoys what the patriarch waited for—a complete salvation.

When Jacob thus expressed himself, it is implied that he felt his need of salvation:—"I have waited for thy salvation;" or, as the Chaldee paraphrast renders it, "I expect this salvation." This earnest expression in a dying moment implied that he felt

his need of it. Some people think they are "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Others think they have strength enough to strike out a way in spite of all opposition, and seat themselves in heaven and everlasting happiness. Such persons neither see, nor understand, nor care, nor wait for, nor expect this great salvation. Jacob, however, felt that the days of his pilgrimage had been evil, if they had been few. He had many a trait in his past history to look back upon with every emotion save that of satisfaction and delight. There was many a crooked path in Jacob's course — many a dark spot on the patriarch's robes; much spoken that he would rather had been unspoken, and much done that he would rather had not been done; and he had therefore so deep a persuasion of his unworthiness in the sight of God, that he prayed, in substance, if not in words, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified;" and he looked forward to that which could alone meet his case — salvation. The deep conviction of our need of a Saviour must always precede our saving apprehension of that Saviour; and the deep conviction of needing salvation is the prophecy that you will obtain it: for the sense of the need of it is the first work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart, before he reveals to him Christ Jesus in all his glory and all his offices. The Holy Spirit tells us first what we are, before he shows us fully what we need. He first gives us an inner sight of what is there, before he gives us an

outer trust in what Christ is, and has done for us. The Spirit shall "convince of sin."

Jacob not only showed that he felt his need of salvation, but that he had a knowledge of it. Jacob heard the Gospel preached as well as we—not so clearly, nor intelligibly, but still as truly. He recollected that first promise, which was the sheet-anchor of the antediluvian patriarchs—"The woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head." He must have had no slight knowledge of that great salvation, when he could predict the time of it, and the character of the Author of it:—"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh"—the perfect Saviour—"come." He recollected, too, Moriah, where his grandfather brought his father to be offered a willing victim; that very Moriah on which it was then said, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," or "The Lord will provide;" and that very mount, the one on which the cross was raised, and on which Jesus suffered and died for our salvation. He thus saw, by these lights, along the vista of some thousand years, and waited for, or expected, the end of all—the great salvation. He *waited* for it—we *read* of it. By hope he rested on the Saviour; by faith we rest on him. Hope makes the future become present; faith makes the unseen become seen, and the unfelt become felt. But whether faith or hope, it is the same Saviour who is all and in all.

As Jacob thus felt his need of salvation, and thus showed his knowledge of that salvation, we may expect that in all his life he displayed these expe-

riences by outward and visible proofs. Read his history, and you will find in all his course from Canaan to Egypt, and in Egypt, that recognition of God, that constant habit of worship, that erection of the altar wherever he pitched his tent, that offering of sacrifice wherever he had tasted a blessing, which proved he saw Him who is invisible, looked forward to that great salvation, and by anticipation tasted its sweetness upon earth, as he now inherits its grand provision in glory, and in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

Jacob looked forward to the accomplishment of it as a future fact, whilst he enjoyed it as a promise. The atonement itself had not yet occurred, but sinners were saved on the strength and *certainly* of its eventual occurrence, as truly as we are saved from its actual occurrence. It is absolutely sure that God, on the strength of the promise of it, saved Jacob, as it is now sufficient for God, from the fact of it, to save us. Jacob therefore looked forward to the certainty that Christ would die, that the Great Captain of the faith would suffer, that righteousness and peace would meet each other over that slain Victim; and thus confidently anticipating the fact, he fed on, and was refreshed by the promise as embosoming all, till it ended in complete and glorious accomplishment.

This expression of the patriarch, uttered on a death-bed, is evidence of the patriarch's faith in a hereafter. What he had waited for during a century was surely no vain, paltry, or evanescent thing. Surely it must have been something greater than

this world can give. He knew and felt that he was a pilgrim and a stranger, looking for a better country; and he believed that when he died earth would take its own for a little, but that heaven would not forget its own—the soul that cannot die. He knew, as well as we, “that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” He too believed, that absent from the body is present with the Lord. The aged patriarch rejoiced to know that the close of his sufferings was the commencement of his joy; that death was not ceasing to suffer by ceasing to be, but ceasing to suffer in order to begin to enjoy those pleasures that are at God’s right hand, and those joys that are for ever and ever. And in the hope and prospect of this blessed deliverance he waited, and praised, and prayed, and was happy.

But more than this, Jacob looked for the resurrection from the dead. There is no doubt that the resurrection from among the dead, as it should be rendered, is one of the brightest, most frequently urged, and most cheering hopes in the whole New Testament Scripture. We are constantly taught to look for it. One has no sympathy with those who say, “Who cares for the body? who cares where it is buried?” The body is redeemed as well as the soul. The body, in the case of a believer, is the purchase of the Redeemer’s blood as well as the soul. And why did this dying patriarch give such minute directions that his body should be laid in the land of Canaan, and in the grave that Abraham

purchased for Sarah? Why did Joseph feel it such an obligation to comply with his dying request, were it not that he felt that his dust reposing in Canaan was in itself a foreshadow and an earnest that the same dust would be reconstructed into a more beautiful than its first form, and would rejoin its glorified inhabitant, and so both soul and body should be for ever with the Lord in the everlasting Canaan?

Thus the patriarch waited for the salvation of the soul, which was immediate, and for the resurrection of the body, which was to come. Let us rejoice to believe, according to an express promise in the Bible, that we of this last age of the earth shall meet these grey patriarchs of the first. The children of both twilights—the children of the morning twilight, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the children of the evening twilight, those who are here in the latter days of the earth—shall meet where all twilight shall be lost in meridian sunshine. Ye “shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. viii. 11.) And when Jesus would prove the resurrection of the dead, he said, “I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matt. xxii. 32.) And therefore Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, were with God.

When all shall thus meet, the first and the last, and the last and the first, and Christ be all and in all, then shall be the perfect Church, in which our provisional churches shall be dissolved; for when

that which is perfect is come, then that which is provisional shall pass away.

We learn from Jacob's biography that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven. What a long, weary pilgrimage was the patriarch's! What disappointments, losses, fears, failings, suspicions of God! ("Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me") and then the discovery, before life's lamp was quenched, that all things were but the parts of an exquisite mechanism, combined for, and contributing in harmony to, a grand and beneficent result; and learning before he died to repent of all the past, and seek salvation through the Shiloh the Peacemaker, to whom the gathering of the weary tribes of Israel, and of all the believing Gentiles, is to be.

The end of a Christian's life is peace. "Mark," in Jacob, "the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." He had truth — therefore he felt peace. That beautiful ladder which he saw in his pilgrimage in the desert was revealed to him, in his dying moments, brighter than it shone above him in his sleeping moments; and through the Shiloh, its antitype, he not only saw the angels descending and ascending, but felt himself borne along on feet that wearied not, and on wings that flagged not, step by step, till at last he was with God, and with the Lamb in glory.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOPE OF THE FATHERS.

"This was the age when mind was all on fire —
The days of inspiration, when the soul,
Warmed, heightened, lifted, burning with desire
For all the great and lovely, to the goal
Of man's essential glory rushed; then stole
The sage his spark from heaven, the prophet spake
His deep-toned words of thunder, as when roll
The peals amid the clouds: words that would break
The spirit's leaden sleep."

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." — GEN. xlix. 10.

WE are told in the Gospel according to St. John, that Abraham saw Christ's day along the vista of the many years that intervened between him and the advent of Jesus; and that when he saw it, he rejoiced. It would be strange if so illustrious a descendant of Abraham as Jacob, or Israel, unquestionably was, had not seen, at least as clearly, the same Light that now enlightens the Gentiles, and is soon to be the glory of his people Israel. He too saw the Hope of Abraham, and was glad. Ancient patriarchs and modern Christians had and have but one only Saviour. The morning twilight in which Jacob lived and died, and the evening twilight in

which we live, and love, and believe, both came and come from the same grand Sun, the Sun of righteousness, the Saviour of sinners. The evening of life, in the case of most of the patriarchal cloud of witnesses, seems to have been generally a cloudless, always a quiet, sometimes a brilliant, sunset. They found it, literally, at eventide light. Their spirits seem to have been sprinkled, just as they were emerging from their earthly tabernacles, with the first beams of that brighter and better land, in which they were to be gathered to their own people; and as they left this world, they saw, felt, and enjoyed, more than the earlier rays of this world to be. Simeon's last hours were his brightest; Paul's dying moments were his most heroic—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Stephen, falling asleep under the stones so cruelly hurled at him, by those who ought to have listened to him, saw an apocalypse of God, and Jesus at his right hand, far clearer than he had seen before. A Christian's death should be a Christian's pæan; it ought to be his song of victory, thanksgiving, and praise; and not the opposite. Surely it is a blessed hope, that as the outer man decays, God seems, in condescending love, even in this world and dispensation, to invigorate and gladden the inner man more and more. As the mists of old age cover the outer eyes, a new and a brighter light seems to shine on that inner eye, which knows no mist, but grows in brightness and range of vision, till it sees God and Jesus just as they are. We have all learned in our limited expe-



rience that God sometimes rolls away the clouds that keep heavenly things from the view, and enables his dying Stephens still to see above God, and Jesus at his right hand. Sometimes God lifts the curtain that keeps eternity from time, and enables his dying Abrahams and Israëls to see far beyond the horizon, and to rejoice in the Christ to whom they are going. So was it with this patriarch. His last breath was poured out in benedictions—his last sympathies were around them that were his; and when he had finished his course, and discharged the functions assigned to him, all the clouds, storms, and vexations of his past days rolled suddenly away, and he gathered up his feet, and gave up the soul, and rejoined the loved groups that were snatched from him on earth, never again to part any more.

It is at such an hour, and amid these blessings, and on a death-bed, that he utters a prophecy so clear, that it is hard to see how the modern Jew can possibly escape its force. He says, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah." What is meant by "the sceptre," or as it is translated, I think more justly, by Dr. Benisch, "the rod?" This is so important a promise, that if it be unquestionably a prediction of our Blessed Saviour, the Jew must come to one of two conclusions—either that the whole prophecy is false, and has not been fulfilled, and that his own law, of which he is the consecrated guardian, is not God's Word; or that the Shiloh is come, and that Jesus of Nazareth is the glory of his people Israel. Let us very care-

fully and faithfully, ever remembering it is God's Word, try to analyse and examine it. There are various translations of it given by the most ancient and venerated translators. The Chaldee translation is, "One having principality shall not be taken from the house of Judah, nor a scribe from his children's children, until the Messiah come, whose is the kingdom." That was written long before Christ came. The Jerusalem Targum, or Commentary, as we should call it, gives the verse thus: "Kings shall not fail from Judah, nor skilful doctors of the law from among his children, until the time when the Messiah shall come." The Samaritan Pentateuch has this rendering: "The sceptre shall not be taken from Judah, nor a leader from under his banners, until the Pacificator come." All these ancient versions understand by "sceptre" simply "jurisdiction." Now is the word "sceptre," or "rod of authority," used in that sense in other parts of Scripture? It is said in Amos i. 5 — "I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden," that is, who hath jurisdiction. And you will find, in Numbers xvii. 2, that each tribe of the children of Israel had its distinctive rod: — "Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods," or sceptres: "write thou every man's name upon his rod." It was therefore given to them as the symbol of authority. The assertion,

then, in this text substantially is, that the tribe of Judah shall not lose its jurisdiction, or consolidation, as a tribe; its authority and distinctive peculiarity as a body having government, law, and rule, till the Messiah come; and, by implication, that the other tribes shall have previously lost their rods, or shall have ceased to be distinct, separate, and corporate bodies or kingdoms. Is this fulfilled? What are the facts of the case? We have only to open the page of history. The ten tribes were dissolved in the captivity of Babylon, and the merest shattered wreck of them emerged. The tribe of Judah remained till Christ's days. The name given to the land is Judea, from Judah; the name given to the people from Judah is Jews. The tribe remained till Christ came, and for half a century afterwards, and then it was dispersed, not destroyed. Now here is the fact, that every one of the tribes, except Judah and Benjamin, having been merged before this time, had disappeared and melted away as distinct and separate tribes. The only tribe that remained was the tribe of Judah, which survived the death and resurrection of our Lord, and the day of Pentecost; and now Judah also is dissolved. There is not a Jew in Christendom who can authoritatively tell what tribe he belongs to, or who has his genealogical records surviving, of any authenticity whatever; and the depressed Jews who walk through our streets look like the wreck of a grand dynasty, telling aloud to the nations of mankind, what they take no interest in—that all their sceptres have been shivered, that Shiloh has come, and that Jesus of Nazareth is He.

The next assertion is, "Nor a lawgiver from between his feet." Now, although the strict rendering of the Hebrew may be "lawgiver," it is obvious from analogy, and from the context, that it cannot mean a law-maker, but a law-writer, or proclaimer; because God himself assumed to be, what he was, the only Legislator of Israel. This was a prerogative that Deity would not be denuded of; and, therefore, the word "lawgiver" is employed in Scripture to denote a writer of statutes, or a scribe; and in 2 Chronicles, xvii. 8, 9, this office is described:—"And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama, and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people." These were the scribes, or writers, or teachers of the law. In the days of our Lord we read of the lawyers or the scribes. The lawyers were not law-makers, but law proclaimers; just as a barrister, or counsel, in our country, does not make the law—this is the prerogative of Parliament; but interprets and explains it, by giving what he calls an "opinion" upon it. But what is the meaning of the expression "between his feet?" It is equivalent to "at his feet." Mary sat at the feet of Jesus; and again the demoniac, clothed and in his right mind, sat at the feet of Jesus. It is also equivalent to the word "possession." Thus we read, in Deutero-

mony, "All the substance in your possession," literally, "between his feet." Hence it means that Judah should have its sceptre, and a teacher of its laws, until the time that He who is here called Shiloh should come. We find these lawyers existing at the advent of our Lord; and in this fact we have another distinctive mark of the tribe of Judah—that it should retain its authority, and have scribes and teachers of the law subject to it, until the time when Shiloh or the Saviour should come.

Let us examine the meaning of the word "Shiloh." It is derived from a Hebrew word, *shalon*, which means "peace," being of the same derivation as part of the Hebrew word "Jerusalem," or "Yerusalem," the meaning of which is "vision of peace," or it may be almost "vision of Shiloh"—"vision of Him who is the Peacemaker." "Jerusalem" reminds me of that beautiful exclamation of Jesus, where he alludes to its name, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!" How touching! "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, vision of peace, if thou hadst only seen that vision of peace which is now before thee! but now it is hid from thine eyes." The meaning of the word "Shiloh" then, is "Peacemaker," or, as the Samaritan Pentateuch translates it, "The Pacificator." The prophecy is, therefore, that the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor shall a scribe or lawyer be taken from his possession until the time that the great Peacemaker shall come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

This is one link in a chain of important prophecy. The first was a war prophecy—"The woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head." This was given in Paradise. The second is a peace prediction—that the great Pacifier or Peacemaker shall come. And both together denote that it was through war He should reach peace, through conflict He should gain victory; but that the result of that conflict would be "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." We cannot but notice, as we pass on, how large a place this blessed Saviour occupies in all ancient prophecy. The Sun of righteousness at first just appeared with a little, if one might use the expression, of his rim above the horizon—pale, misty, with great clouds intervening; but as time rolled on, he rose higher and higher, and now the pale sun that gleamed aslant over the wrecks of Paradise—yet full of hope, and communicating great comfort—has risen in these days a stage higher towards his meridian throne, and the rays that were once horizontal are becoming more and more vertical, until when the noon of the millennium comes, there will be a vertical sun, and no shadow. At present, every Church and Christian has a shadow—there is defect connected with all; but when the great Sun shall reach his noon, and shall shed down his vertical splendour, there will be light without any darkness at all, truth without a shadow, and character without its detracting accompaniments.

It is predicted that "unto Him," that is, the Messiah, "shall the gathering of the people be."

This very prophecy is repeatedly referred to in other portions of Scripture. It is said in Isaiah xi. 10, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people, to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious; and the Apostle Paul, quoting this very prophecy of Isaiah, applies it to Jesus—"And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust." (Rom. xv. 12.) The Greek Septuagint translates the verse, "He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles;" just as it is said in Haggai ii. 7—"The desire of all nations shall come." The Syriac translation gives it, "For him all the people shall wait." But perhaps "gathering" is the best. What is the meaning of *congregatio*? A congregation, a gathering together, as a flock of sheep within a fold. It is said that to Christ, the Shiloh thus come, shall the congregation of the people be. In other words, He shall have a Church that will last even to the end. Two or three shall evermore meet in his name.

This prophecy implies a prior fact—that there is a separation from him; a truth stated in every page of Scripture, if not directly, yet impliedly. Our sins have separated between God and us. Heaven is the grand, beautiful, and holy continent of the blessed; this world is an island which sin has rent and torn off from it, and a great, deep, and awful sea now rolls between. Our sin has struck off earth from the continent of heaven. Where God made one, now there is severance, interruption, separation.

But there is not only, alas! moral distance, but worse. We are intellectual creatures; and there is disinclination as well as separation. Man is not willing to go back again. The poor prodigal is an exemplification of this. He who was brought up in a noble hall, having left his father, in obedience to his own wild and reckless passions, rather than go back and look that father in the face, would herd swine, the most degrading office to a Jew, and be satisfied to eat of the husks that the swine did eat; and it was only when matters became so desperate that even husks failed, and there were no swine to herd, that he formed the resolution which he carried out, "I will arise, and go to my father." Such is human nature still: the last being it will go to is God. It is restless, and yet it shrinks from the only rest. Every man is in search of happiness; and he is not wrong: he was made and meant, originally, to be happy; and his pursuit of happiness is a right thing. All we lament is, that each is digging out at great toil, and much expenditure, cisterns which all find are broken, and will either not hold water, or the water that is in them is polluted. It is the grand privilege of the minister of the Gospel to proclaim to the prodigal, eating husks and herding swine, that there is a welcome for him in his Father's house; and to the man who is most industriously digging cisterns, that he is welcome to the fountain of living waters. It is a blessed truth, that when man has become so depraved that even his fellow-man casts him off, God will take even the very dregs of life in his mercy, and build them up

into a fabric of beauty, and a monument of his mercy and forgiving love. God's heart takes in whom man's heart shuts out. Our sins have separated us from God, and have made us disinclined to go back to him. And worse still—the longer we live at a distance from God, the farther off we go. Sin has a projectile power; man is under a centrifugal influence; he is flying farther off from the centre of all happiness. The last sentence on the wicked is only the fixture and permanence of that apostasy, "Depart from me," as if departure were the very essence of woe. What is the address to the blessed? "Come, ye blessed of my father," as if nearness to God were happiness. Man does not need to be driven down to hell. He is by nature under a centrifugal force that will carry him farther and farther from God; and his sorrow and misery will increase in the ratio of his distance from Him, as joy and gladness multiply in proportion as we come nearer and nearer to Him.

But the prophecy is, that in spite of this severance, this disinclination, this disruptive force, under which we are born, "unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." The last gathering will be a glorious one. The dust that sleeps beneath the green sod, or in princely mausolea, or under monuments of bronze, or in the pyramids of stone—the dust that is scattered on the floor of the unsounded and stormy sea—or that has grown into herb, and fruit, and flower—or that is built into the very fabrics in which we dwell—shall one day feel a quickening breath pass through it, and atom shall come to atom,

and the vast valley of dry bones, exceeding many and exceeding dry, shall become a splendid array of living, responsible, and rejoicing men. At that day, none will be so mean that he will be forgotten—none so great that he can refuse to come. The mightiest of the Pharaohs shall hear the sound in his pyramidal tomb, and as instantly obey it, as the poorest of the Israelites that died under his crushing bondage in the land of Egypt. At that day will be the manifestation of the sons of God; the bride will be ready for the bridegroom. The “hundred and forty-four thousand” sealed ones shall be there—no more in the clinging garments of decay, but in resurrection robes of glory, and so shall be for ever with the Lord. What a bright hope! Faces that have disappeared in the shadow of death will there appear radiant with immortal youth. Originals, of whom the dim images in memory, as in a picture-gallery, are all that remain, shall re-appear. The mother shall meet the babe she lost in infancy—the child the long-absent parent; and friend shall meet friend, and bonds shall be re-created never to be dissolved. What a magnificent assembly! What a glorious church! Blessed Lord! may we be found in that happy group at that day, through Jesus Christ! But to be found in that assembly, to be gathered to Christ then, it is requisite that we should be gathered to him now. Now we may be gathered as immortal souls; then we may be gathered as soul and body together. But how are we to be brought to him now, that we may be gathered to him then? The great central object is Christ: to

him shall the gathering of the people be. Christianity is not subscription to a creed, but living, personal relation to the Son of God. It is most important to recollect that the answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is not "Believe in justification by faith," precious as that doctrine is; but "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In other words, Christianity is not the acceptance of a doctrine, but living union to Christ as a branch to the vine, as a limb to the body—sympathising with him, and sympathised with by him, and inseparable from him for ever.

Hence this gathering at the last day is not to be to any church, however pure or excellent. We may love the Church—"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord:" "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." All that we are called upon to do is, not to put the Church in the room of the Church's Lord; nor to fancy that, because we belong to a church, therefore we belong to Christ. Let us make sure of belonging to the only and true Saviour, and depend upon it we shall never go to the wrong church; but if we make sure of belonging to a church, we may forget to make sure of what is infinitely more vital—belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This gathering of the people is to Christ, and not to any minister, or ruler, who may or dare occupy his place. This is a vital distinction. Were the Bishop of Rome what he professes to be, the Vicar of Christ, gathering to him would not be gathering to the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation, in

short, is not connection with a prelate, a priest, or a presbyter—with a church, a chapel, or a denomination, or the preference of a liturgy, or the exclusion of it: it is something infinitely higher than all that. When we begin to fight about these things, we have descended to too low a level. Men never quarrel about such paltry things, till they have lost their hold and apprehension of the Saviour, whose glory, if flowing down, makes these things little, and insignificant, as matters of dispute. Nor is it salvation to belong to any reformer, or founder of a church whatever. You may be most enthusiastically what is called a Protestant, and yet you may not be a Christian. There are men in the Protestant Church who are no Christians; and in the Church of Rome, in spite of its awful corruptions, there are some of God's people. "Come out of her, my people," is the call: therefore God has a people in her—some who have only singed their outer garments in the fires of the apostasy; and some who, in spite of the darkness in which they live, have affinity with the Sun of righteousness, the only Saviour, in the skies. Gather people to a presbyter, and you make them Presbyterians; gather people to a bishop, and you make them Episcopalians; gather people to a pope, and you make them Papists; gather people to Christ, and you make them Christians. The Jew would judaise the world; the Anglican would anglicanise the world; the Romanist would romanise the earth; the child of God, rising to a loftier table-land, and animated by a nobler inspiration, thirsts and longs only to Christianise the world.

To belong to Christ is to be a Christian — this is enough ; nothing less will do, and nothing more is wanted. It is to Jesus alone that we are to come.

But why is it so important to gather together to Him ? There are at least two plain but momentous reasons. One is, that he is the only way by which God's forgiving mercy can ever reach us ; and, secondly, he is the only evidence to us that God our Father truly loves us. If God loved us, could he not have saved us without sending his own Son to become incarnate, and to die for us ? What God could have done, or what may be the range of his omnipotence, it is not for us to say ; but this we do assert, because Apostles have asserted it before, that God's love could not reach us consistently with his justice, holiness, and truth, except by some process, or channel, or provision, in which, while his love should reach us, his justice, holiness, and truth, should be glorified and satisfied in so doing. It is a paltry law that has no penalties. He must be a sorry lawgiver who cannot enforce the laws he has made. The law is not a subsequent thought—it was not made upon Sinai. Some people seem to have an idea they do not actually express—that God arbitrarily laid down over-strict demands upon Mount Sinai ; that he found people could not obey them ; and that then he instituted an extraordinary provision upon Mount Calvary, to rectify the past and save the future. But "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," is just as eternal as God's throne. That sin is misery or hell, and that holiness is happiness

or heaven, is part and parcel of the very fabric of God's moral universe. If then we have sinned, or broken that law, the question arises, How shall God fail to exact the penalty, when the sinner is before him who has incurred it? Or how shall God forgive the sinner, and yet show to the whole universe — for humanity occupies but a little nook in it — that sin and holiness are not mere shams, or make-believes, in the mind of God? The answer is given in Christ. Jesus took our place; he was made our Substitute; he is my Representative. What I deserved as a sinner, he has endured. What I owed to God as a creature, he has paid. When I appear at the judgment-seat, and the question is asked, "Thou hast broken the law: why shouldst thou not be condemned for ever?" my answer would be only this, "Jesus, who knew no sin, was made sin for me, and bore its curse, that I, who have done so much sin, might have his righteousness, and inherit in him, and through him, and because of him, everlasting joy and peace." The greatest sinner and the greatest saint have nothing else to plead; and, blessed be God, this plea is all that is needed. Now, through Christ, God's love may reach me; and instead of justice, holiness, and truth protesting, they form themselves into the channel down which that love comes, and lightens upon me in streams of pardoning mercy and forgiveness.

And Christ is not only the channel by which God's love can reach me, but he is also the proof that God loves me. The text does not read, "Christ died: therefore God loves us;" but the

text reads, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." In other words, Jesus is not the cause in God's bosom of a love that was not, but he is the expression and evidence to me of a love that always was. He came forth, not only to convey that love to me, but to show how God loves me: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now here is the reason why the gathering of the people is to be to Christ: in him alone can we find pardon. Not that Christ makes God willing to do what he would not otherwise be willing to do; but that Christ's death makes it possible, consistently with His moral character, to bestow upon me a sinner that which I have not deserved. And, therefore, the gathering of the people shall be to Christ as the pathway to the skies, as the medium of God's communication with me. The earth, as we already noticed, was wrenched off from the continent of heaven; a great deep sea fills the chasm between; and Jesus is the bridge across to us, and the communication between the island and the continent to which it belongs; and through that communication angels may descend and ascend, as ministering servants to them that are the heirs of salvation.

The next and not less interesting question is, How shall we be gathered to Christ? First, we are gathered to Christ by providential arrangements. There is, perhaps, scarcely a Christian who does not recollect that it was what the world calls an accident that brought him into contact with the means

that were the conversion of his soul. It was the accidental turning of a corner, or meeting of a friend; a conversation in a railway carriage, or in the cabin of a steamboat; or a single paragraph seen by the merest chance in a newspaper, which brought us to hear some grand truth we can no more quench at this moment, if we would, than we can our own immortality. What the world calls accidents, is God in providence leading to a God in Christ. Perhaps some great and distressing affliction fell upon you like a cold, freezing, enveloping shadow—and in its gloom, its darkness, and sorrow, you sought for comfort, and could find none. You were brought, however, by that very painful stroke, to seek something better than the world can yield; and now you have found, not only a spring of comfort in the desert, but the light of truth in darkness. God in his providential arrangements, is thus bringing thousands, day by day, to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Let us never undervalue an opportunity of saying a good word in the world, any more than of understanding a text in the Bible. It is as sure as our immortality that there is no such thing as that which the world calls, in its ignorance, "chance." Your connection in your home, your position in your pew, the bread that you earn, the health you enjoy, everything connected with you appears to be accident, but nothing really is so. Let the history of the last fifty years be laid before me. Had there been given me the opportunity of doing what I pleased at any one point, the whole history of Europe would have been altered. It is

upon little things that grand results hinge. Hence, when you have the slightest opportunity of saying a word, however short, for religion, the Bible, or the Saviour, do not hesitate to say it; or, when you have the opportunity of urging, "Come and hear a minister, who does not preach eloquently, but who preaches what will do you good," do not let it slip. We have no conception upon what little word in season great and magnificent results may repose. The longer one lives the more one finds this true.

We are gathered together to Christ, not only by providential arrangements, but also by ministerial efforts. What is the office of a minister? To draw souls to Christ. He is not a priest to make an atonement; he is not a Saviour to take the place of the great Shiloh; he is simply an ambassador, an advertiser, if you like, of the fact that the Shiloh has come—and that there is now pardon, salvation, sanctification, grace, and glory, for the chiefest of sinners. And that minister does his duty most faithfully, who is best satisfied to fall into the shadow, that the blessed Master may alone be seen and looked at. If Moses had stood between the brass serpent and the dying Israelites, they would have perished; but he felt it was his highest dignity to crouch into the lowest nook where the pole stood, that the brass serpent alone might be seen by a dying people. And so the minister of the Gospel, in the language of the Apostle, "preaches, not himself, but Jesus Christ, and himself your servant for Christ's sake." And as that is the best signboard which is most legible, he is the best minister who tells you—not

the most beautifully, or most eloquently, but most faithfully and plainly—the way to heaven. The very end for which a ministry exists is to show men the way to heaven. The object of the institution of a church upon earth is to gather souls to the Son of God. The nonsense that has been talked about apostolical succession is enough to make men infidels by the thousand. Rather let me be the instrument of winning one soul to the Saviour, than be able to trace the links of the apostolic succession through eighteen centuries with perfect and unfailing accuracy. Which is the best corn-field? The field that grows the best corn. Which is the best vineyard? That which grows the best grapes, of the best flavour, in the greatest quantity. Which is the best corn-mill? That which grinds the most corn, at the least expense, and with the least noise while it does so. And which is the best church? The church that with the least talk about itself gathers most souls to the only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Souls are also gathered to Christ by the attraction of love. God's great plan in the Bible is, not to preach the terrors of the law, but the love of God in Christ. The only hope of reclaiming mankind to the Saviour is by the pure, earnest, and reiterated exhibition how God in Christ has loved us. God preached from Mount Sinai, and said, in awful language, "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not." But what was the effect on the people? They begged that the word might not be spoken at all. God spake from Mount Gerizim in benedictions; the people retired and cursed him to his face. God

spake from Mount Ebal in curses, and the people became hardened the longer that they heard him. At last, God stood upon Mount Calvary, and showed so unspeakable an expression of love — love which loved us in our ruins, and in spite of them — which saved us even when we did not want to be saved, and for no good it could yield to God, but only for blessings it could bring us — that when asked, “Simeon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” my answer must be, “Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee.” “We love him.” Why? “Because he first loved us.” Therefore, the process for generating in my heart love to God, is the study of God’s love to me. If a person hate me with all his heart, and if I want him to love me, what plan shall I adopt? If I command him to love me, he will smile at me. If I try to force him to love me, his answer will be, “You can punish my body, but you cannot make me love one I hate.” If I say to that person, “I will give you wealth, rank, and title, if you will love me,” he will answer, “You ought to know that love is not to be bribed.” But let it be a mother, who accidentally drops her babe into the roaring torrent; I leap in the instant I see it, and snatch her babe from the waves, and replace it in her throbbing bosom; and she will instantly feel such gratitude to me, that there is no sacrifice — she will not freely give as the expression of a new and heretofore unfelt love. This is God’s way. The plan of terror has failed, the plan of law has failed; the great plan is now to preach God’s love; and the exhibition of such love will melt the most obdurate

hearts, till men, unable to resist it, will say, "We love him, because he first loved us."

And what will be the practical effect of this? Love is the fulfilling of the law; for the whole law is comprehended in this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." The plan, therefore, to make holy men is to preach efficiently God's love in Christ Jesus; and the sermons that are generally blessed are not such as describe in fierce language the terrors of the lost, but those that unfold God's great love in Christ Jesus, in greatest force and with most eloquent persuasion.

But we need also what we must not forget—Divine power. The Holy Spirit is requisite to apply to our hearts what Christ has done. "It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Do we then feel this love? Have we been gathered unto Christ? Do we find in him the resting-place of the heart, the home after our wanderings, the refuge in the midst of the storm? If we be found in Christ the Shiloh, the higher light that shines from him will not indeed extinguish, but it will make pale, all the lesser lights and attractions of this world. The love that we feel to Him will not quench that of earthly relationship, but it will make all sublunary love poor and paltry in comparison. Left in our native soil, like gathered flowers, we must soon wither; but drawn to him and planted in his light, we shall bloom—trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord—in his presence for ever and ever. It is this living religion

only that can give real happiness here and hereafter. If you want to be happy, be Christians; if you want to be the happiest men, be the highest Christians. Its direct tendency is to give the peace that the world cannot give.

The unity of the Church of Christ is that of all God's people gathered to him, and not to any earthly head. Christians of different denominations will live closer to each other just in the ratio in which they approach the Shiloh. We can conceive a large circumference, and radii passing from it to a common centre—the nearer every two radii approach the centre, the nearer they approach each other. It is so in a higher matter—the nearer we are to Christ, the nearer we are to each other. The unity of the Church is, not that which is formed around a false centre, but that which is found in union to Christ, and to each other for his sake. That church has the greatest excellence which most facilitates the approach of man to Christ, the great centre; and that church is singularly defective that intercepts the Christian in his movement towards Christ, or detains him at any point midway.

See here the true catholicity of the Church. The Church is catholic in destiny now, not in fact—for a very small portion of the world is Christian at all. The Church is catholic in promise, not yet in performance: but a day comes when the whole earth shall be covered with the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he alone shall be exalted—and to him and around him, in glad and clustering groups, all tribes, and tongues, and nations, and kindreds, shall

gather; and the name "Christian," which was first, is the name that will be last, when Christ and Christian shall be all and in all. Are we gathered into the blessed fold? As the shadows left on earth of those that have gone up higher multiply, do we aspire more and more to eternal day? Are we less under the attractions of earth? Does truth seem to us every day more true? Do we welcome her, not as a necessity, but as a bride?

CHAPTER IX.

THE NIGHT SIDE OF LIFE.

“The more we live, more brief appear
Our life’s succeeding stages:
A day to childhood seems a year,
And years like passing ages.

“When joys have lost their bloom and breath,
And life itself is vapid,
Why, as we reach the falls of death,
Feel we its tide more rapid?

“Heaven gives our years of fading strength
Indemnifying fleetness,
And those of youth a seeming length,
Proportioned to their sweetness.”

“And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. — GEN. xlvii. 8, 9.

THE question put by Pharaoh to Jacob seems at first a trivial one; but when well weighed, it will appear one that every man ought to put and answer for himself, “How old am I?” We know not how long we may live, but we do know how long we have lived. The past of our life is all luminous in the light of memory; the future is a mystery that no man can penetrate, and that no sagacity can

forecast. "How old is my friend? my sister? my brother? my wife? is not the question. We are each ready enough to speculate on the character or age of our neighbour, if it will save us all inspection of our own. Here is a personal inquiry for earnest study, "How old am I?" How old the earth may be geologists can settle; but how old am I in the prospect of soon leaving it, it becomes me now to ponder and decide.

If seventy be, as matter of fact, if not as matter of Divine arrangement, the almost universal ultimatum of human life—if eighty and ninety be the rare and remarkable exceptions—by ascertaining how much of our course we have run, we may see, if we should be spared to the extreme limit, how much even at best remains. Yet who needs to be told that even in the rest of our life that remains there are pitfalls here, and snares there, diseases elsewhere, and what men call accidents in all directions? so that fewer than seventy years mete out the life of the great mass of mankind, and it is rare indeed that some reach eighty, ninety, and a hundred years.

But what, it may be asked, would render such an arithmetical inquiry so spiritually important or useful to us? Life is a solemn trust. However solemn it may be to die, it is far more solemn to live. Many a man can die with the courage of a martyr, who has not lived with the purity of a Christian. It is more easy to die divinely than to live divinely. Life is, indeed, a solemn trust, given us by God for great, important, endless ends. The ascetic thinks to gain the future by despising the present; the

sensualist thinks he gains the present by despising the future ; both are mistaken. The Christian alone enjoys the present, and makes preparation for the future ; who lives *in* the world, doing well its duties, but not *of* the world, nor shaped by its influences, but looking for a better and a brighter land—the true Canaan—the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Life is not only a solemn trust and mission, but it has infinite and endless relations. This life of ours, likened to a shadow that continueth not, stretches, nevertheless, into everlasting ages ; this lifetime of ours, so brief, is the seed-time of a harvest that we shall reap for ever. “What a man soweth,” should be inscribed upon every heart, “that also he shall reap.” If so, what are we sowing ? What are we now doing ? A creative influence is going from us into the world that is to be. What we are made in this life, either now or before we die, that we must be in the life which is to come. Eternity receives its colouring and complexion from time. Death discloses no waters of ablution ; it only fixes the direction in which we are moving : so that he who is unjust shall be unjust still, and he who is holy shall be holy still.

How old art thou ? Is the answer that comes from many a bounding heart, “Ah ! I am young—I have plenty of space, and sunshine, and happiness before me ?” Youth is not immortality ; youth is not necessarily the prophecy of old age. Many a bud is bitten by the frosts before it blossoms ; many a fair tree, full of rich and beautiful hopes, has been

blasted by the spring, or corroded and destroyed by a worm at its root. Is the answer again, "I am not young, but I am in the middle time of life—the full strength and vigour of manhood?" Your sun, then, is approaching its meridian; but will he stop there? Can you charm him to tarry on his meridian throne? The spring of life does not always gradually uncoil; it sometimes snaps, and is broken into shivers in a moment. Manhood is not a guarantee of old age. The health and the vigour of to-day are not intimations from on high that you will see sixty, seventy, and still less eighty years of age. The answer that comes from another is, "I am old, and if not so old as the patriarch Jacob, yet I have attained an age that is known to be pretty near the edge of that horizon where time and eternity meet and mingle." In your case the lease of life has almost expired; your sun is setting in the west; the sands of your glass are nearly run out. And who has not noticed that after we have attained the top of the hill, which is the midway between youth and age, the years increase in velocity? or it seems as if, when the action of the machinery within becomes more slow, the speed with which time rushes past becomes only more rapid, and you are often constrained to say, "Here is another Christmas! who could have thought it? It looks like a dream!" If, however, you discover you are old and grey-headed, and on the brink of the great eternity, can you say, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace?" Can you say, "I have deep sins to recollect—words spoken that cannot be unspoken

—deeds done that cannot be undone; my sins are like the sands, like the crimson, and like the purple?" and yet, can you add what the oldest is warranted in saying, "Yet I can go up to the judgment-seat in the light of everlasting day, in the strength of this one text, which is worth a world of gold — 'The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth from all sin?'" Blessed is he who so feels: justified by faith, he has peace with God. Let your sun set in the west; it is only that he may rise in greater splendour in the everlasting east. Let sin remind you of its poison; let the law condemn you; let conscience rebuke you; but who is he that condemneth? It is God that justifieth. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's people? It is Christ that died. I am persuaded of even the most aged man, whose past life has been dark, sad, and sorrowful enough, that if at this very moment he can lift his heart to God, and feel, if he do not express with the lips, "O God, if thou shouldst deal with me as I deserve, I should be cut down as tares only for the everlasting burning; but this is my trust, that thou didst so love me, that thou gavest thy Son to die for me — that He who knew no sin was made sin for me, that I who have done nothing but sin might be made the righteousness of God in him," that man is safe. Oh, what a glorious message is the Gospel of Christ! what an awful silence would that be throughout the world were this sweet sound hushed! what an eclipse, were these bright promises to fade from the sky of God's Word! But whether young, in manhood, or in old age, let us

pray, "O Lord, if I am young, let me not presume. O Lord, if I am aged, let me not despair; and whether young, old, or in mid-age, teach me, O God, so to number the days that remain, that I may apply, not my ear only, but my heart unto wisdom." Pause, therefore, and walk silently on that shore washed by the eternal waves of that unsounded sea on which we must soon set sail. None are, therefore, too old to be saved to-day; but let none put off till to-morrow, or procrastinate till 1857. We are charged in this book with no gospel for to-morrow, but with a most glorious one for to-day—an offer so large, so comprehensive, that there is not one sin in the soul that is most stained which may not be blotted out, nor one sinner who may not be forgiven—for Jesus came into the world to save not only the chiefest of sinners, but the oldest also.

If one be very old, that is no reason to make him unhappy. There is nothing more beautiful than age, when found in the way of righteousness. The autumn tints are admired by taste; the traces of age are appreciated by Christians, when sacred and sanctified. If this life were our all, with what agony should we leave it! If we did not know of another life when this is finished, a dog's life would be more enviable than man's. The dog, the horse, or the sheep, does not know what death is. They stumble blindfold against it, and drop without having any idea what it is; but man has in him a thirst after life, a yearning after immortality, a desire to live; and if that desire is to be nipped when it is strongest, then of all men, well may an Apostle

say, we are the most miserable. But when a Christian is leaving this life, he is only poising his outspread wings to soar to a brighter and a better. If you have reached sixty, seventy, or eighty in your ascent, one step more, and you are on the tableland, where all is sunshine. The mountain has been climbed, the fight has been fought, the course has been run; and now there remains for you a crown of glory, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

If you are young, be cautious, prayerful, watchful. If, again, you are in mid-age, review the past, look into the future; ask yourself the question, "Is it well with me?" And if your answer be, that you are old and grey-headed, let your prayer ascend — "O Lord, forsake me not when I am old and grey-headed." And if your prospect of removal be every day more unequivocal, then pray again that you may be able to say with the aged Simeon, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

But the answer of Jacob will give us the best idea of what life now is. The question was put to him by Pharaoh, "How old art thou?" The answer of the patriarch was, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." First, he tells him that life is a pilgrimage; next, that the days of that pilgrimage are few; and, lastly, that they are evil. Then what is life? The answer is, a pilgrimage. How does it become so?

Not by the robe that a man wears, but by the heart that a man has. Pilgrims in mediæval days wore pilgrim robes, and had sensual hearts beneath them; but the true pilgrim is he who, whatever be his robe, feels that this world is a strange country — that his life in it is residence in a foreign land — and that his home, the home of his age, the rest of his spirit, remains beyond and above for him, and for all the people of God. He sees in this life that there is an eternity behind him, and an eternity before him; and between the two eternities only Christ the one Mediator, the way from the condemnation of the past to the acquittal of the present, and the enjoyment of the future. But that life is a pilgrimage we have enough every day to teach us. We all admit it, and some of us very painfully and poignantly feel it. Let us see what are some of the proofs that it is so. How varied is human life! In one case life is a ceaseless struggle, extracting out of the unwilling earth what it so reluctantly renders. The first curse is felt in all cases: "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." And when it is the brain that works instead of the hand, we may depend upon it the curse is not mitigated; it is often aggravated a hundredfold. Look back at the week, or month, or year, now past — what struggles in trade, what anxieties in the counting-house, what fears, disquiets, and perplexities to make ends meet, to be just before God, and right and generous in the sight of man! When ours is a Christian heart, we only feel it more acutely. In your sunniest hours have you not had presentiments of dark ones?

There are battle-fields in human hearts as terrible as ever have been fought on earth. There are tragedies and sorrows in human bosoms that no Shakspeare ever wrote, and what they only who have felt them can adequately appreciate.

If life be a struggle in one case, in another it is a sad and sorrowful experience. We may now have bounding hearts, but we have in our homes, it may be, bleeding and broken ones. How many broken hearts, melancholy firesides, and mourners, that, like Rachel, will not be comforted, does each day pass over? As each evening approaches, it shuts down on many a life that, like the prophet's scroll, is written with weeping, mourning, and woe outside and inside; and, unlike the prophet's scroll, it is impossible to disclose it, and thus enjoy the sympathy that lightens the load which makes the heart almost break as it bears it. Is not life, then, a pilgrimage? But if the children of God, we shall feel it comparatively light. We pity an afflicted man who has no grace in his heart, and no glad Gospel in his soul; but we only sympathise with an afflicted man, who knows that life's sharpest sorrows and bitterest hours are merely the April showers and clouds that usher in the everlasting and beautiful summer. He knows and feels what grace alone can teach him, that his worst troubles are not sent in wrath, but in mercy — to teach the poor to look for true riches, the rich that this is not his rest; and to impress upon all, whatever be their riches, rank, or learning, that they are pilgrims, strangers, sojourners, looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

In some cases life is a struggle, in others life is sadness and sorrow, and in many more it is an absolute weariness; and, exhausted with its trials and difficulties, we are almost ready, like the over-wearied soldier, to drop down in the march of life. How melancholy, to see undone in the long and weary night the fabric of beauty that we wove so diligently by day! How often are anticipated pleasures the most poignant stings! How often do the most brilliant joys set in darkness almost as soon as they have appeared! and how often have you said in the bitterness of your heart, in the conflict of your feelings, and in the anticipation of the trials that are before you, like the prophet, who said it sinfully and wrongly, "It is better for me to die than to live." But be patient; if life be a pilgrimage, it is not a very long one; though, in the case of Jacob, there was many a trial that made his life a very sad one; and there is no portion of Scripture more intensely beautiful and interesting than that which describes patriarchal scenes. We remember such traits in Jacob's life—as his conflict with his brother Esau; his exile to Padan-aram; his service of that grinding, exacting taskmaster Laban, in comparison with which the hardest taskmasters in this world are as nothing; the base conduct of Simeon and Levi; and, lastly, that of Reuben and Judah; then the death of the beloved Rachel; his loss of Joseph, and the tears that he shed; his bitter anxiety lest he should lose Benjamin also; and standing in the presence of the greatest monarch of the day, his hair silvered over with old

age, and his brow reminding one of the brown seasand, from which the tide of life is rapidly ebbing — how he leaned upon his staff, and bowed down with years and troubles, answered most truly, “Few and evil have been the days of the pilgrimage of thy servant.” Have not some of us our Padanaram of exile? Have not some of us had our Levis, and Reubens, and Judahs? Do we address no weeping and will-not-be-comforted Rachel? Has not many a father a Benjamin, about whom he has been anxious; and Josephs whose loss he deeply deplores? and is not your life very much like Jacob’s, as echo is like sound, as copy is like original; and your days like his, few and evil, and a pilgrimage to the end? We have much outside and around us to remind us that all this is true. You cannot look upon the world of material nature, on which we tread, without feeling that it is the depository of buried generations. The prophet says, “We all do fade as a leaf;” but in one respect the parallel fails, because the leaves on the trees remain throughout the summer, or at least most of them, until the autumn, and then they die peacefully. But one man dies here, and another there; one dies young, and another in old age. We do not die in mass, but in detail; and each thinks that each is mortal except himself. When we look around us on the world itself, everything indicates change — rising and setting suns, reproduction and decay, even to the striking of the clock. Every swing of the pendulum cuts off a portion of life. All these things are meant by God to remind us that life is a pilgri-

mage, that its sands are rushing out, and that less remains than was before. Look into your own families, and see the same premonitions. Those grey hairs that you cannot prevent are the stern prophets of approaching old age. That frailty here, that feebleness there, that loss of elasticity in this muscle and in that, all tell you that age, decay, and death, are coming; and no pomp or splendour of circumstance can hide, and no palliatives can diminish it. We feel in our families, as well as read in our Bibles, "Thou shalt die."

We have seen leaf after leaf drop from the tree of life; and there is no position where one is so deeply impressed with the precariousness of life as in that of the pulpit. Pews that were once occupied by those who took sweet counsel together have other occupants; grey heads that blossomed, like the almond-trees, in the midst of the congregation are ascended to our God. Some who could say, "My father," can no longer say it; and others cannot say, "My mother, brother, sister, husband, or wife." But, blessed hope, if we can say these words no more upon earth, it is only that we may trace their footsteps in the pilgrimage we are now traversing, and till we meet them where scattered groups are gathered, and where they who died in Jesus, live for ever with the Lord. No circumstance, pomp, or riches can materially conceal our pilgrimage state. The whole of man's life, in every rank, is pretty much upon a level. We who are poor see those above us who are rich, and sometimes we are foolishly tempted to envy them. We know not what

we do. Under the robes of our Queen, the greatest upon earth, there is a true woman; and under that poor widow's beggar-rags there is no less; and we may depend upon it that parents on a throne feel as deeply the loss of their children as do parents in a humble hut. The rich man's pain is as acute as the poor man's, and sometimes much more so, because he is rich. The great lady who hears that her lord has fallen upon the field of battle, does not weep more sincerely, or feel more deeply, than does the peasant's wife when she learns that her soldier-husband has perished in the forlorn hope. Humanity is always and everywhere substantially the same. Owners of a castle have their sorrows equally with the inhabitants of a hut; and they feel, when they lose their first-born, as the poorest peasant feels when he loses his. All lives are not written, so that we can read them; but no doubt there are sorrows in unwritten lives far more poignant than have ever been written. There is no threshold in large London without a shadow upon it; there is no hearth in this great city without some painful remembrance associated with it. There is no song that we sing in our gladdest hours, in which there is not an undertone of melancholy minor, reminding us that tribulation must be our common cup upon earth — but teaching us also, that when earth is gone, and the cup is empty, there is a rest remaining beyond for all the people of God.

“Few,” adds the patriarch, “have been the days of my pilgrimage.” Jacob lived at this period to one hundred and thirty years, Isaac lived to one

hundred and eighty, Abraham to one hundred and seventy-five, and Terah to a still greater age. But whatever be the age we reach, few are the days of our pilgrimage. One would have thought that Jacob, having lived to the long period of one hundred and thirty years, might have said, "The days of my pilgrimage are long." They seem long as we look forward; but when we look back, even these seem short.

At the end of life we must all say what Jacob said, "Few have been the days of my pilgrimage." When we are grieved and vexed they seem long, when we are happy they seem short; but when we come to the end, we find that time has passed with impartial speed over our joys and our sorrows; and at the close of both our deliberate verdict is, "Few have been the days of my pilgrimage."

But he says, they have not only been few, but also evil. If life be a pilgrimage at all, we have in this the proof that our days have been evil. This is not evil in the sense of moral wrong; but evil in the sense of misfortune. We all remember that verse which people often quote to prove that God made sin — "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6.) That means, "Shall there be adversity and trouble in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" "Evil," then, means "painful," "sorrowful," or "sad." It is well it is so. If our days were all good, however few or many, we should forget where we are. If life were undiluted attraction, it would be a ceaseless indulgence. It is well that the life of those

who are looking for "a city that hath foundations," should not be all prosperity and sunshine, lest they should forget that they are pilgrims and strangers looking for a better country. It may be said, perhaps, all this seems very sad, and is a very melancholy view of life. The real question is, Is it the true one? It is the night side of human life; it is its dark and sombre aspect. It is clearly meant that our joys should be drawn, not from the earth, but from above it; and that the very sombreness of this life should induce us to seek happiness and peace from another and a better. However sad it may be, there are springs in its desert; there are flowers in its bleakest wilderness; there are spots of sunshine even where its greatest shadow is. If there be much in life we deplore as sad, we must not be insensible to the incidental blessings that God has sprinkled on the path of our pilgrimage along it. What greater mercy is there in this world, next to the safety of the soul, than health? Health of body, and a bright sunshiny day, are great blessings; and these blessings are for the poor, as well as for the rich. Our greatest blessings God has scattered upon the highway. But this view of life, though it be sad, has nothing in it cloistral, monkish, or sour. It is only to enable and induce us to look above it, and draw down into it compensatory joys, which God has promised to them who truly and heartily seek them. There is in this life, and at every stage of this pilgrimage, that precious source of gladness, a Bible—that spring in the desert, that storehouse of consolation. Read it,

study it; and it will brighten life's darkest spots, and give you a peace in conflict that the world can neither give nor take away.

And if our days be few, if our experience be sad and sorrowful, as we have endeavoured to show, learn these instant and imminent duties. Make sure of possessing the only right to eternal rest. Do not live a single day without being sure that you have found the way that leads to a brighter and a better life. There is no certainty that your heart will beat till the sun of to-day sets. Then what a tremendous risk, to leave unsettled for a single moment whether you are in the way that leads to heaven, or in the downward and retrograde path that conducts to everlasting misery! There is for us to-day a complete salvation, instant pardon, the offer of perpetual peace, without money and without price, without promise on our part or pledge of any sort. "There is none other name given among men whereby they can be saved, but the name of Jesus; and that name may be your and my password, the password of the universe. He who holds it, loves it, cherishes it in his inward heart—looks to the only sacrifice, trusts in the only righteousness, pleads that only name, has a right and title to eternal happiness, that nothing will exhaust or deprive him of.

Let us regard life as a means towards an end. Life is not the end, it is only a means to the accomplishment of an end. In fact, this present life is the midway passage from the shores of death to the shores of everlasting life: it is no more. Taste,

therefore, the blessings of life as you pass on, gather the flower that blooms by the wayside, sip from the stream that rushes by at your feet—but do not fancy that this is your rest, or that here you will live for ever. Let not any burst of sunshine upon your path ever lead you for a moment to forget that

“Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.”

Let us regard this life as means towards an end. And let the very shortness of it be to us consolation. If a man finds himself in battle, the shorter the time it lasts the more he is satisfied. If you are on a journey, the sooner it is over the more you are delighted. If this life be a pilgrimage—a sad, sorrowful, and evil one—then it is but common sense to suppose that the sooner it is finished the greater will be our joy. What makes us wish it protracted is, not our leaving this world for a better, but our reluctance to face death. Therefore, it is desirable to detach from the mind those apprehensions of death which there is reason to believe are not well-founded. When a Christian dies, it is not he, but death that dies. Our thoughts in the Bible are constantly directed to the coming of the Lord, not to death. Death is rarely urged as a motive, and never as a hope. It is the characteristic of those who are strangers to the Gospel, that they are held in bondage all their lives by the fear of death. Our two great thoughts ought to be—life now,

with its responsibilities—life then, with its joys, and only Christ the stepping-stone from the one to the other, from a world that fades to a world of glory and of joy. Death is but the opening of the door that admits into heaven; and the last sigh that escapes from the lips of the dying, is but the creaking of that door on its hinges before it ushers into the sunshine and joys that are in the presence of God and the Lamb for ever. There is no sting in death to a Christian; there is to him no terror in the grave. Death is the close of life's sorrows and pains, and the commencement of joy and happiness that are for ever. We do not live truly till we live where there is no more death, nor sighing, nor sorrow.

Let us count our life less by years, and more by deeds. That man lives the longest who has done the most good; while he lives the shortest life who has done the least good. What am I doing in this world, either to make it better for my having been in it, or to help others to the happy rest that remains for the people of God? Are you, by the liberality of your gifts, by the piety of your conduct, by the suggestions of your conversation, trying to make others more wise, holy, and happy; so that, when life closes, you may be able to say, I have not frittered away this great capital of life in mere frivolity and folly? While doing is not merit, nor giving the price of heaven, each is the evidence, the expression, and the fruit of our gratitude to God for his great mercies, and of our love to our Father for making us his adopted sons. What

then are you doing? Review the years that are past. You have laid out so much upon ornaments and pleasure. We do not blame you; it is not wrong. Every man lives best for society, when he occupies that sphere in which God in his providence has placed him. If those who live in the higher ranks of life were to descend, and live like the lower classes, society would go to pieces. It would be absurd, and it is not to be expected. But we do expect that every one, according to his wealth, should give largely and liberally to that which is good, not only for the spread and maintenance of real religion, but for the clothing of the naked, the feeding of the hungry; for "this is pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father—to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

CHAPTER X.

PENIEL, OR GOD FACE TO FACE.

"The ocean looketh up to heaven
As 'twere a living thing,
The homage of its waves is given
In ceaseless worshipping.

"They kneel upon the sloping sand,
As bends the human knee,
A beautiful and tireless band —
The priesthood of the sea.

"The sky is as a temple's arch,
The blue and wavy air
Is glorious with the spirit-march
Of messengers of prayer."

"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen
God face to face."—GEN. xxxii. 30.

APART from the chief lessons taught by a mysterious struggle, there seem to be involved in it some subordinate ones, of great personal and practical value. Probably the scene at Peniel was designed to teach Jacob that struggles and conflicts yet awaited him; that nevertheless he was not to be discouraged by external opposition, but to take heart, and bravely meet all, in the strength of Him who had raised him up, and intended him yet to be conqueror. It may also have been meant to teach

us the condition of the Christian Church, wherein conflict, controversy, fears within, and fightings without, are to be her universal experience. Nor was it less fitted to show, that as God appeared to Jacob behind the shadow of the man with whom he wrestled—so, in all that betides us, as in all that befell him, there is ever present behind the seeming human, the really Divine. All those trials that we cannot now understand have their commission from a Divine source; and, wounding us slightly, they benefit and bless us materially. We also learn here that our strength lies in the same source from which our wound comes. He that kills is he that makes alive; he that wounds is he that makes strong; and the wound, or the light affliction, which is but for a moment, is not worthy to be compared with the blessing, the great glory, that is to be revealed.

But, while these lessons may have been taught, yet above them there seems to be so striking and impressive a proof of earnest, untiring, successful prayer, that in this light alone we wish, in this chapter, to regard it. The whole scene in itself is most remarkable; one cannot construe it as otherwise than historic fact. If it had been a mere dream, it would have been so specified. The very spot where all this occurred must naturally have been to Jacob a very memorable one. He called it *Peniel*, because he had seen God face to face. There is not a country upon earth which has not places which are still the Peniels of lasting and glorious recollections. England, Scotland, Ireland, America, France, has each its spots that are watchwords—

thrilling watchwords—the very mention or recollection of which inspires their flagging hopes, sustains their drooping hearts, and nerves them for future and more heroic feats. There are spots too, in other lands, of another sort, still more remote, but suggestive to the memory of the Christian. The Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Gethsemane, are the bright Peniels of the world—the places where man has seen God face to face, and yet has lived. If memory could let go the recollection of these, and such as these, earth would be disenchanted of its most awakening and interesting recollections: its brightest and most beautiful gardens would become deserts and wildernesses, by being dissociated from those precious recollections. But if there be places in all nations which are in some measure Peniels, and spots in Jerusalem and in Palestine that are literally, strictly, and indelibly so, there are also in each man's biography bright Peniels. Is there no sermon there that first deeply impressed us? Is there no sanctuary in which we first heard the Word that became to us the savour of life unto life? Is there no minister of Christ whose ministry was first blessed to awaken, to stir, to animate, and cheer? There are spots upon the earth on which the snow in winter will not lie; and there are places in each man's biography on which oblivion will not sleep—where the heart cannot look without being subdued, softened, animated. And these become brighter as we grow older—they become disintegrated and detached in memory from all the evil and the alloy that was mixed up with them in actual fact; and,

in after years, and in the eve of life, we look backward to our Peniels, and feel refreshed by the recollection, and take heart to go onward in the march and journey of life that still lies before us. Are there not in our biography, however humble and obscure, such Peniels as these? Are there no eddies in its current where God first met us? Are there no nooks, or windings in its stream, where God swept past, and we arose other and stronger men? Are there no years, scenes, persons, associations, that became to us the causes of new movements, and that are now remembered as the most beautiful and precious images embalmed in memory? Happy are they who have had such Peniels, and happy are they that recollect them, and see God in them!

But let us view the whole of this scene as a picture of true prayer—prayer in its simplicity, and its essentials—detached from the local, the conventional, the circumstantial. Jacob's fold-stool was the green earth, his oratory the open air, his liturgy simple words breathed out and flaming from an earnest and a loving heart. It is not, as we learn from the success of Jacob's prayer, the place that gives efficacy to the prayer, but the prayer that makes the place holy. It is not the oratory, as it has been alleged by some, that makes prayer, but prayer that makes an oratory—in a coal-pit, or with the Alpine herdsman or upon the deck of the ship tossed by the gale, or upon the eve of battle. The heart alone makes prayer, and prayer makes holy any place; and builds the oratory, and consecrates

anywhere a church, a true church, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bowed knees, and beautiful words, do not make prayer, but earnest desires from a heart bowed by love, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, and thirsting for God—the living God. There is a very beautiful picture of Prayer, written by one of the sweetest poets, James Montgomery, the Moravian, in which he says—

“Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed;
The motion of a hidden fire,
That trembles in the breast.

“Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear;
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near.

“Prayer is the simplest form of speech
An infant's lip can cry;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

“Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air;
His watchword at the gates of death,
He enters heaven with prayer.

“Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,
Returning from his ways;
While angels in their songs rejoice,
And say, ‘Behold, he prays!’

“The saints in prayer appear as one,
In word, and deed, and mind,
When, with the Father and the Son,
Their fellowship they find.

“Nor prayer is made on earth alone,
The Holy Spirit pleads;
And Jesus, on the eternal throne,
For sinners intercedes.

“O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod,
Lord, teach us how to pray!”

Circumstantial things do not constitute prayer in its reality; and this settles a question that some have often asked, and as often tried to answer, “Is prayer by a Liturgy right?” and the other question, “Is prayer right when it is extemporary?” Both are often right, and both are often wrong. It is not the form that makes prayer—it is not the absence of it that vitiates prayer. Many a true heart prays with a liturgy; many a formal heart prays without one. They that prefer—from its adaptability, and from the belief that the Spirit teaches and inspires—what is called extemporary prayer, cannot surely be blind to the advantages of liturgical worship, or to the many excellences and beauties of the Liturgy used in this country. But we should never quarrel about these things. The devil delights to see us quarrel about things outside of living religion—about a white or black gown, a liturgy or extemporary prayer—about Episcopacy, or Presbytery, or Independency; he strives to keep the conflict outside, in order to ward it off from that region where alone living religion is, and true prayer has its birth, its origin, and its efficacy. God himself says, “In all places where I record my name, I will

come and bless thee." Language, geography, form, standing, kneeling, falling upon the face, are the transient of our religion; praying by the inspiration of the Spirit, in the name of Jesus, to God the Father, is the eternal and unchangeable. True worship ennobles. Surely, if man ever is covered with his greatest glory, it is when he bows his heart the lowliest before God.

What a dignity to be allowed an audience of the King of Kings! What a glorious privilege, anywhere and everywhere to have access to God the Father! The heart's first sigh, and the soul's last sorrow—man's little griefs, which the world will not take notice of, and man's great agony, too big for tears and for utterance—have all equally a resounding echo, and a blessed response, in the bosom of our Father and our God!

Having thus ascertained what are not the essentials of prayer, let us try to gather what are some of its essential elements. The first appears to be a deep sense of inward want. Prayer was born out of the first sigh that rose from Eve's faint and broken heart. Men began to pray when men first learned to sin. A sense of deep want is the mother and the source of earnest prayer. We ask in this world what we want—and earnestly in proportion to the excellence we attach to the thing, and to the deep sense that we feel of its necessity and its value. Without this deep sense of want, the lips may speak the most eloquent words that were ever uttered, but there is no prayer; there is the tinkling cymbal, there is the sounding brass, but nothing more.

Prayer is intensely asking what we intensely feel the want of; and the prayer is real in proportion to the deep sense of want that we feel. John Knox's prayer, which I dare say many have heard of, was a memorable one — "O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!" that is, Let me see it return unto God from Roman superstition, or I die — the language of an earnest soul. A deep sense of want is the first prerequisite to prayer; and wherever there is such sense, there will be no fine words. When we hear a person pray in very fine words, we may be sure there is no deep feeling in his heart. It is unnecessary to ask you to read — because every one must have read — at least some of the great dramas of Shakspeare. When any of his personages speak from deep feeling, how very naked, terse, and simple the words are! Intense feeling always unfolds itself in words of great simplicity; under the influence of deep emotion, there is no time to beat about for fine and musical cadences. The feeling seizes the nearest vehicles for its utterance, if not the most eloquent. A strong sense of want and misery speaks out in plain Saxon words. Give us the most argumentative, or the most eloquent, or the most picturesque sermons if you will, if such be your taste, but never let us hear fine prayers. Such are rarely real, and always distasteful. The more simple the words are, the nearer we approach the grand model — "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" — how simple! — "give us this day our daily bread; deliver us from evil." And Jesus' own petitions, how simple! David's,

how plain in their expression! because most genuine in their feeling and in their origin.

Another element in true prayer is perseverance in asking. God has promised (and these are very practical and very important thoughts for a Christian) to answer prayer—but he has not said, prayer continued for a day, or a week, or a year; he will not tell you how long you must pray; but he does tell you that if you persist in knocking, one day he will open; if you knock one day, or a year, and then, because the door is not opened, retire and infer that God does not hear prayer, you do injustice to God, and you contradict the plainest announcements of the Bible. Your duty is to persevere, not because importunity will change God's purposes, but because perseverance is the evidence of the intensity, the earnestness and the reality of your desires, and so far proof that you feel you really need what you plainly and fully ask of God. He says, "Seek, and ye shall find; ask, and ye shall obtain; knock, and it shall be opened; pray always—pray without ceasing;" and then he adds, he will answer. Why should it be otherwise? It would be strange if, while we are saved by grace, we should be saved in indolence; if, while in everything in this world it needs toil, and labour, and effort, that in the higher things of eternal life it should need none. It would be very strange if God has commanded industry in this world's business, that he should have consecrated indolence in the affairs of heaven. If a man in this world wants anything—a seat in parliament, a wife, gold in Australia or California—he will

work hard and long in the pursuit of his end ; and if God so sanctions active effort in providence, why should we infer that he will dispense with it in grace ? Let us take heed lest it shall be told us at a judgment-day, that we expended more labour, and were more persistent and patient, in petitioning for an earthly boon, than we ever were in asking the King of kings for grace, and glory, and every blessing that we need for this life, and for that which is to come.

In order to offer real prayer, it is necessary that there should be within a deep sense of unworthiness. Jacob prefaced his petition with this, "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." If there be no inner sense of unworthiness, our prayers will degenerate into demands ; but if there be felt an abasing but not therefore degrading sense of unworthiness, our prayers will take the place and form that best becomes them — of humble petitions. A sense of want will give earnestness to our prayers ; a sense of unworthiness will shape our prayers into petitions ; and the sense of God's love in Christ will convince us that we never pray in vain, or as one that beats the air, without the assurance and arrival of an answer. Were we worthy, we might demand ; but our unworthiness is the reason why we must never demand, but always pray. God's promise in Christ is the ground, when we thus pray, of our sure expectation of a blessing exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

In order to offer true prayer, let us remember the promises of God, and the reason of their being given.

The reason why God gives promises in the Bible is, not merely to cheer us — though this be true, and precious as true—but also to give us materials, prepared and suitable, for prayer. The promises are the gold in its rough state, as it is found in the gold mines and fields; prayer is that gold shaped into prayer, stamped with the name of Jesus, and used in currency. The promise comes from heaven for man; the Christian turns that promise into prayer, returns it to God who gave it, and He honors it, and sends it down in precious blessings. Whatever God has promised in his Word is meant for us on earth to turn into prayer to Him who gave it. Does God promise, “I will give you a new heart?” why should we not melt it into fervent prayer, and cry, “O God, give me a new heart?” Does He promise to pardon sin? It is for us to seize the promise, translate it into earnest petition, and ask Him for the forgiveness of sin; and as sure as we thus turn his promises into prayers, and present them to Him in the name of Jesus—earnestly, truly, from the heart—so surely will he answer them in the shape of countless blessings. Has He promised that right shall one day be might, and that loftiness, and dignity, and power, shall one day be holiness; and that truth shall no more be denounced as folly, or proscribed on earth, but enthroned as wisdom, and the whole earth filled with His glory? We may pray, and it is God’s desire we should, that such days may come speedily; and the growing number of those who thus pray is the strongest pre-intimation that the day of fulfilment is at our doors.

We must have confidence in God's sufficiency and willingness to give. Nothing is too hard for his power to do; nothing is too rich or precious for his love to surrender. The evidence of this is the simple fact, and yet irresistible logic, which everybody can understand, "He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" If God has given the greatest, the choicest, the best expression of his love, it is but rational to expect that he will give lower and less expressions of it, as may be most expedient for us. As often as we pray, it is the expression of confidence in God. It is the soul on its journey heavenward, asking from above things it cannot find below—seeking satisfaction from the Fountain of heaven, because not found as often as sought in the cisterns of earth. It is man presenting himself as a beggar—owning that he has lost all by his own prodigality—conscious that he cannot retrieve his position, and, naked and poor, imploring God of his great mercy to do all for him, and for his great name's sake.

Jacob asked especially God's blessing. He said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." We here see the intense earnestness of Jacob's prayer, the untiring persistency of it—"I will not let thee go." We cannot but observe the childlike simplicity of it in the words he used. Nor can we fail to notice the unworthiness that he felt—"I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies." It is also important to study the main thing that he asked. He asked temporal things, it is true, but the main thing

he asked was a blessing—that which sweetens bitter lots and sanctifies bright ones. We do not need a blessing only when we are afflicted; we need a blessing in our prosperity as truly and as deeply as in the day of our deepest suffering. If our trials be blessed, they will all work together for good to us; if our joys be blessed, we shall taste new sweetness in them, and see new beauty as they approach us, and learn alike the value and reality of that promise, “I will bless thy bread and thy water.” Our labours need to be blessed; for labour that is not blessed is like trying to collect water in a sieve—as fast as it comes in, it is sure to rush out. The promise is, “Thou shalt eat of the labour of thy hands.” And our families need to be blessed; for the reason why so many families are so rent and so torn is, that there is not a blessing among them; and the reason why there is not a blessing is, that the parents do not seek it. There is no reason in God why every family in our country should not be a happy and a blessed one, either in having, or in spite of having not; the sole reason is in man. If we ask, we shall obtain; if we knock, it shall be opened unto us. This is the unchangeable promise of our God.

The blessing is the true cure for all disorder, the true secret of all peace. If we ask simply health or prosperity, we ask outside things, which may or may not be blessings; but when we ask God’s blessing, the poor man will feel his penny far sweeter than the rich man feels his pound. It is not wealth that makes happiness, it is not poverty that destroys it; it is the blessing of God that maketh rich and

addeth no sorrow. Whenever man seeks other things, or proposes to seize other things, in order to obtain happiness, his conduct is that of an empiric. It is as if a person had aneurism of the heart, and the physician were to order lotions to be applied to the outer skin. If the upas tree were growing, and dealing around its deadly and its pestiferous shade, man's plan would be to sow a few new flowers, or graft upon it a branch of an olive tree, or an apple tree, or a pear tree, thereby only creating a momentary respite of the blight and the desolation it distils; but God's plan is to lay the axe at the root of the tree, and then to sow broadcast the seeds of flowers that will never fade, till the desert smiles, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose, and all nations find shadow and peace. Therefore Jacob said, in the exercise of a philosophy as profound as it was pious, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Some things God will not answer; there is one thing he will not give, because of no good to us. He will not answer prayers for the gratification of curiosity, while he will answer prayers for the grant of blessings. Jacob asked, "What is thy name?" This Divine Being, who evidently was the Angel of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus, and not a created angel, told him that he could not yet know it, and he would not reveal it to him. Some things it is only waste of time to pray for or pry into. There are secrets, the seals of which will be broken only amid the light and splendour of everlasting day; there are mysteries that lie shrouded in darkness which will last with time, and that will be

rolled away only by the dawn of the everlasting morn. Let us not waste our time in asking instruction in secret and in curious things, impenetrable to the human mind, and not promised to be explained by God; but let us ask those plain things, and everyday things, that we need for soul and body, comprehended in that most perfect form, the Lord's Prayer. There is no petition there to know secrets that belong to God, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, deliver us from evil, lead us not into temptation"—how plain, how intelligible, and yet how comprehensive of all that man needs!

Thus, the Angel-God refused to satisfy Jacob's curiosity, while he answered Jacob's prayer for a blessing; and only the parting wing of the angel, and the blessing that he left behind him, revealed to Jacob that he had seen God face to face. Let us learn from the whole of this passage to pray to God from the heart; to pray simply, to pray earnestly, to pray for blessings, present and eternal blessings, that we truly need. Let us, in all our perplexities, as we learn from this passage, draw near to God. He will give light in them, whilst he will not gratify the curiosity to which we have alluded. We need grace for each new phase in God's providential government; and, guided by his wisdom, we shall find that the problems of the world are the axioms of the Christian; and, strengthened by his might and inspired by his Spirit, we shall be more than



conquerors over every opposing difficulty, through Him that loved us and gave himself for us. Success will be more than a compensation for a whole night of persistent prayer with God. Prayer has power; earnest prayer receives an answer, not an echo; persistent prayer is sure success. Jacob's wrestling is the evidence of it; and his memorial, Peniel, is the unobliterated proof, even to this day, that he so wrestled and was so answered.

And the surest sign that God is about to give a blessing is, that he has raised up increasing numbers more earnestly to seek it. Whenever we hear the whole Church of Christ praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!" we may expect that he is at the doors. Such prayer is prophecy; it is more than prophecy—it is the augury, the evidence, and the foretold that an answer is about to be bestowed, exceeding abundant above all that we can ask or think.

In order to present proper prayer—the just expression of our wants—let us seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. When he inspires the heart, the whole life becomes a liturgy, every day a Sabbath, all places sanctuaries, the broad earth the Christian's Peniel. Wherever the Spirit of God takes up his abode in the heart, every palpitation of it is a prayer. On the crowded thoroughfare, amid the transactions of this world's business—in all relations, in all scenes, in all trials—the Christian prays, and yet his lips do not move. In very high northern latitudes the needle in the mariner's compass dips to an unseen attraction, that cannot be explained: in every situation in which the Christian

is, his heart dips to, and has its polarity leaning towards, the unseen God; and without being seen he prays, unconsciously he loves, and everywhere holds communion with God.

In all our prayers, never let the language be in advance of the sense of our wants, never let us use stronger words than we actually feel. Let the heart be in advance of the liturgy; never the liturgy, whether extemporaneous or otherwise, in advance of the heart. Some men get accustomed to a language in prayer that their hearts do not come up to, and, unless arrested, they will give themselves up by easy and unconscious progress to a hopeless formalism. Let your outer expressions be the exact measure of your inner feelings. Pray that those inner feelings may have their channels deepened, that the current may be richer, fuller, more rapid; but do not get into the habit of using language which you do not mean, or which exists independently of what is going on within. Such a habit is, in fact, hypocrisy with God. Hypocrisy means wearing an aspect that does not belong to us; and hypocrisy in prayer is using language that the heart does not respond to. If, therefore, you cannot use the language that you hear in the sanctuary, better refuse your Amen than give an Amen professedly from the heart, which is not the expression and the exponent of your feeling. One deep, earnest "Our Father," is worth ten thousand paternosters repeated from a rosary; one earnest cry to God, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me," or, "God be merciful to me a sinner," when it is the expression of

inner and true feelings, is real prayer; whereas a long and a beautiful liturgy, which the heart does not fit into, and which does not fit into your heart, is the mere formalism of prayer, not the reality, the substance, and the life.

And, in the next place, always act in the direction in which you pray. The best proof that you are really in earnest in seeking what you pray for is, that you act up to what you pray for, to the extent of your opportunity and your power. If you confess sin with your lips, without any humbling consciousness of it—if you pray for daily bread from God, but go to seize or seek iniquitously to earn bread wherever you can, and at whatever sacrifice—if you pray that you may forgive your enemies, and prosecute them with lawsuits, and do them all the mischief in your power—if you pray for Divine direction, and yet in the world take your own way with headstrong and impetuous will—then your prayer is mere mockery, you give proof that you have been playing with the great God, and well may you wonder that you have seen God face to face, and your life is preserved, for you trifle with and mock God. Therefore, never pray what you are not ready to perform; do not ask in prayer what you will not act up to in daily life; do not pray for direction in a crisis, and when the crisis comes, refuse to act up to what is clearly the mind of God, as expounded to good men, or indicated in the providence of God as the clear course of duty, taking your own impetuous and headstrong way because it seems best to yourself. One of the best

proofs that you pray truly is, that you act up to what you pray as opportunity and occasion permit.

Always pray with right ends in view—simple, sincere, earnest ends. Remember that when you pray, it is to God, who is not deceived by what you say, but who sees what you feel in your innermost hearts. And, therefore, if you pray that God would bless the Church universal, but sub-understand yourself, your own sect, and party, and denomination—if you pray that God would prosper you in business, but have the sub-end that he would make you rich, that you may be more proud, more self-indulgent, more avaricious—then you pray ostensibly for what is good, but truly for that which is personal, selfish, narrow, sectarian. Let us pray for ends that are right, and pray for them alone—for nothing beneath, beside, or beyond them.

Prayer thus offered up in the name of Jesus, and by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, should be for things in their right order. Do not ask temporal blessings as if these were the chiefest things, and spiritual blessings, as if they were secondary and subordinate; but ask first for the kingdom of God, and then all other things will be added. Take the Lord's Prayer for a model. There we see the assertion of the fulness of God first, and the emptiness of man. The first is, "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done;" then, after the Christian has prayed that God's purposes may be purely promoted, he asks, with an intensity proportionate to the relative importance of the thing, "Give me daily bread, forgive me my trespasses.

deliver me from evil." In your prayers, as in your living, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then all other things will be added.

Do not for a moment suppose, according to a miserable and a wretched philosophy, that because God is an unchangeable Being, therefore it is of no use to pray to him, for he can neither change his purposes, nor alter the economies of heaven and earth for your sakes—his absolute and irreversible decrees are far above the reach of prayer. The same Book that tells me God is unchangeable, tells me God hears prayer; and no amount of reasoning, no subtlety of abstract reasoning, will ever convince me that prayer is wrong, or that God does not hear it. All the instincts of humanity—deeper than logic, purer than philosophy, long prior to all reasoning—prompt me to pray; and that God who knows me, and knows himself, also urges and entreats me pray. How to reconcile an answer to my prayer with His own great purposes, I know not; but this I know, when men build roofs of iron, they leave room for its expansion by the heat, and its contraction by cold; and, no doubt, in like manner, there is room left in God's purposes for answers to men's prayers—there is a space left for an answer to the earnest and the living petition; and, at all events, instead of arguing that God's attributes are a reason why He cannot answer prayer, it is worthy of our attention that those very attributes are made in the Lord's Prayer a reason for God's answering prayer; for after it is said, "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, lead us not into

temptation," the very ground why the petitioner expects an answer is the very reason why the infidel philosophers, and the heathen philosophers, would have us not pray — "for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory;" that is, because Thou art the great and unchangeable God, ruling all, governing all, controlling all, therefore, I know it is consistent with thy being and thy character to bestow upon me these the blessings that I ask.

Wherever there is the truest prayer, there will be the most consistent life. Wherever prayer is looked to in its right light, and wielded as the key that opens heaven to the believer, there the life, instead of being indolent, apathetic, and cold, will be the most vigilant, the most active, the most holy. The sails, the compass, and the chart, are not enough upon the ship, unless the winds blow; and the winds are of no use to the ship unless there be sails, a chart, a compass, and a rudder to guide her. The celestial blessing and the terrestrial toil are inseparably linked together; the wrestling Jacob and the Peniel, the earnest and persistent petition, and the manifestation of God, are indissoluble. Praying hearts are ever connected with working hands. The same power that inspires the heart to pray, always and everywhere teaches the hand to work. The man who looks up to God, and feels that God must do all, or all will be lost, will be most characterised by all things that are just, and lovely, and honest, and of good report.

The day of praying will soon pass away, and the day of praise will soon come. Earnest prayer to

God below will culminate in praise to God above. He who was the most earnest petitioner at the footstool, will be the most rapt praiser and worshipper of God beside the throne.

There are really none that do not pray—some are praying for wealth, some for health, some for fame, some for power, praying to gods many, and lords many—all men pray; but it is the Christian alone who prays to the God of Abraham in the name of Jesus, and seeks blessings first that are worthy of the name, and the mercies of the footstool last, and subordinate to these; but what a very awful reflection it will be at a judgment-day, if we find that we might have had all the blessings of everlasting heaven for asking, and we were too proud to bow the heart, too busy with the things of Cæsar to ask a blessing from God!

CHAPTER XI.

THE DYING FATHER'S BLESSING.

“Prayer, surpassing human might;
Prayer, heaven's holy portress;
Prayer, the saint's supreme delight;
Prayer, the sinner's fortress.

“Prayer and faith can joy impart—
Joy beyond expressing,
And call down upon the heart,
Israel's choicest blessing.”

“And Israel blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” — GEN. xlviii. 15, 16.

LET us pause to observe what must intensely interest all — the beautiful portrait presented by the family group assembled together upon this occasion. First of all we see, not the most aged, but not the least steadfast, Joseph. Through what strange incidents had he come — what wondrous chapters in his biography! — sold as a slave by his own brethren, purchased by the Egyptians, placed in the house of Potiphar, falsely and wickedly accused of crime, thrown into prison, emerging from his cell with

brightening lustre, as if such excellence could not be hid any more than it could be extinguished; raised to the highest rank, made the prime-minister of Pharaoh, enjoying all the pomp and splendour of a palace, presenting a spectacle to the grey-haired and aged patriarch such as he had never witnessed amid his native hills or in the valleys of Canaan.

Near to him we observe the aged father, the venerable Jacob—whose more dignified and more illustrious title was Israel—now a century and a half old, borne down by infirmities, and stooping with the weight and load of many years; his grey hairs beautiful and blossoming, to use the simile of Scripture, like the almond tree, and himself waiting for a call to come down from the skies, “Come up hither!” The same man who, in the frost and the sunshine, when a stripling, laboured lovingly for Rachel, and thought seven years—how true to nature!—but seven days for the love that he bare her—the stripling who once slept under the overshadowing firmament, the cold stone his only pillow, but over that stone a vision that hangs rarely over beds more magnificently canopied—the rainbow pathway knitting heaven and earth, and the angels descending and ascending in ministry to him. The aged patriarch is now ready to depart, his pilgrimage is nearly finished, his tent is about to be struck; he remembers at once his beloved Rachel, and the place where he laid her, and all God’s goodness to him; yet he does not forget that moment when he cried in the agony of his torn feelings, “Simeon is

not, Joseph is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." He is now a century and a half old, with more light and richer experience, and is constrained to own "How utterly I was mistaken! Joseph is, and Simeon is, and Benjamin is beside me; and all these things that I thought were against me, I find were working together for good to me;" as they work together still for good to all "that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

Not far from these, the two great portraits in the foreground, Jacob or Israel, and Joseph, we see the rest of his brethren gathered there also. What a group! Meet and beautiful type of that day when all broken circles shall be healed, when all dislocated ties shall again be re-knit; and we shall meet together, not, like the patriarchs, by a fireside, the last embers of which must soon be quenched—but under the roof-tree of our Father's home, where there are many mansions, and where our Elder Brother, the Lord of glory, has gone to prepare a place for us. Shall we meet where the Hebrew group is? There is no question on this side of eternity so momentous, so personally interesting to every man, as this—"What shall become of my soul when this outward tabernacle it lives and sojourns in shall be gathered to the dust of those who have preceded me?"

But let us hasten to look at the place of meeting. It was a sick-chamber. It was more than that; it was the chamber of the dying—perhaps the most solemn and impressive nook in this great world. The last rays of time, in the case of Jacob, were

beginning to mingle with the first beams of glory. The tide of life was rapidly ebbing, and he could hear through the thin partition that separates time from eternity the chimes of the waves of that great, happy, and blessed ocean on which he was soon to set sail. In that Hebrew sick-chamber there was a true church. That was a church there and then met together, and Jacob, Joseph, and his family, were the members of it. What is Christ's definition of a church? Where-soever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It is not the place that makes a church; but the people that are on it. An architect may raise the most magnificent structure on which suns can set and shine; but it needs our most gracious Sovereign to enter into it before it becomes a palace. If she refuse to dwell in it, it is the architect's ^{at} great house, and nothing more. An orator may collect by his powers a large crowd; but it remains a crowd unless the Lord Jesus descend into it, and consecrate it by his name named on it a church. In that sick-chamber there was a church indeed, composed of true and believing Christians. It is not dead stones that build a church; but living stones laid upon Christ the Rock of ages, that grow up into a holy temple, vocal with the praises and hallowed by the worship of the Most High. There was in that chamber a church, grander than Europe's mediæval cathedrals. It is not material splendour, but moral excellence, that has the greatest beauty. Angels in their ministry to man may pass by many a grand cathedral, and pause with riveted and admiring sympathy upon

some three or four kneeling together around a dying parent's sick-bed, and worshipping in spirit and in truth the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There were assembled together in that group those who were the objects of Jacob's love, in whose present spiritual and everlasting well-being he felt the deepest interest. The time drew nigh, we are told, when Jacob must die. The time will also draw near when we too must die. Oh may our last sleep be everlasting strength! Like the venerable Simeon, may we not depart till we have seen the Lord's salvation. And when our bodies shall go the way of all the earth, may our souls go the way of all saints. If we attempt to analyse the group that met together in that sick-chamber, and surrounded their dying father's pillow, we shall find there was in all their hearts many poignant and bitter recollections. They were there who had tried to impose upon the aged patriarch, telling him that Joseph was torn in pieces by wild beasts, bringing him deceitfully his coat of many pieces, and showing him the stains of blood with which they had artificially sprinkled it, in order to induce the patriarch to believe that he was actually slain. And their memories reminded them, and their consciences smote them, that they had sold as a slave, Joseph, who was there present, and that they had almost brought down their father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Judah remembered his wickedness, and Simeon the crimes that made the patriarch grieve and vex his soul every day. And if there be one thought that is the most poignant of all to a

son or a daughter, it is the recollection that we have grieved a dead parent's heart, or in any way done what gave pain, or spoken what should not have been said. No doubt Judah, Simeon, and Reuben, would have given Canaan, and Egypt too, if the word spoken could have been unspoken, and the deed done undone. But this could not be; they could only repent of the past, seek new grace for the future, and go forth, and by their subsequent career compensate, as far as possible, for the grief they had given to the patriarch by taking Joseph away, and thereby almost bringing his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave; and these brethren, as all these things rushed before them, and they recollected what they had done, wept bitterly while they received the new name from Jacob—"Let my name be named on them"—his own name, we are told, was Jacob; he was called so as the supplanter; but the new name with which he was invested was Israel, and accordingly he says, "Let my new name be named on them." Bearing and receiving from him that illustrious name of Israel, they went forth under the inspiration of the same grace that guided and governed their aged father, and walked worthy of the elevation to which they had been raised; and, placed on a loftier platform, they acted as became the sons of the venerable Israel. We have a nobler name than nature can give us; we are no longer called Marah, "bitterness," but Naomi, "beautiful." We have received the name beside which those of rank and dignity pale and become dim—the name of "Christian." Are we working

worthy of it? Are we disgracing that name by our conduct, or are we reflecting new lustre and growing splendour upon it? Can the world say, as they take notice of us, These men are Christians? Can the Mohammedan, the Hindoo, and the infidel, perceive that the grace of God, and the inspiration of the name by which we were called first at Antioch, and by which we shall be known for ever, make us more loyal subjects, more just merchants and tradesmen, better husbands and wives, fathers and mothers? We believe the truths of the Gospel just in as far as they influence and actuate our lives. What an awful thing, if called by a name so grand as that of Christian, we should live lives as mean, ignoble, and sinful as if we were infidels and heretics! For what is a Christian? Not one who can pronounce a certain shibboleth, or who wears a certain badge. Christianity is not circumcision, nor baptism, nor the Lord's Supper; it is not having a name, or wearing a robe; it is not being a Churchman, nor is it being a Dissenter. These are the mere spangles on the robe that are lost in the magnificence of the great character. A Christian is one who worships only God, who rests for acceptance only upon Jesus Christ, who has his heart made new, changed, transformed by the influence of the Holy Spirit of God; who does not ask what men think, but who inquires what God has said; who does not turn aside to listen to the shout of popularity on the right, or to watch for the sign of censure or praise upon the left; but who ascertains from God what is the duty that devolves upon him, and in the strength of God

magnanimously and nobly does it. If we be Christians of this stamp, it will not be inquired at the judgment-seat whether we worshipped in a church or in a chapel, whether we used a liturgy or used none. The last question is, "Who are these, and whence came they?" The grand answer is not, "These are they that came from church or chapel;" but, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, therefore"—on that account only—"are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple."

Thus we have called up the interesting group, the dying father and his assembled children; and we have tried rather to hint, than to develop and unfold, the mingled emotions and feelings which passed through the hearts of that family as they surrounded their dying father. Let us now direct our attention to the benediction that the patriarch pronounced upon his children:—"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them." He refers first of all to his fathers, Abraham and Isaac; and how does he refer to them? Not by the dignity they received as patriarchs, but by the character they exhibited as Christians. He says, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." It is not what a man looks, but what a man is, that God regards. When God estimates character (and when we have the same light and the same spirit as he has, we

shall estimate it so also), he does not look at what a man is called, or at what he wears—but how his heart leans, and what his heart beats. It is moral and spiritual character that is so magnificent in the sight of God. Accordingly, the dying patriarch, when he referred to his forefathers, merged all recollection of their patriarchal dignity as princes and nobles, and mentioned only their Christian conduct—they walked before God. Some men adorn any station, and are themselves adorned not even by the very highest. It is delightful to see the man outshine the name, the dignity, the rank; it is otherwise when the rank and dignity are all that the man has. Hence, when the patriarch referred to his fathers, he quoted that feature which belongs not to the grave—"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." That inner moral character outshone all their patriarchal greatness—it is remembered when their dignity is forgotten.

But what is meant by walking before God? It is a frequent scriptural expression, used to denote true Christian life. When a man walks with God, like Enoch, or before God, like Abraham, he thereby proves, first of all, that he is of one mind with God—for how can two walk together unless they be agreed? And he shows, in the next place, that he is not only of one mind with God, but that he has life. Walking is the result of vitality. A dead man does not walk. The fact that a man walks, in the high spiritual and moral sense of that expression, is the evidence that he has the true life. If there be the feeblest pulse in the wrist, you may be sure

there is a heart in the background. The fact that a Christian walks with God, is the evidence that he makes progress. Walking is progression. No man morally and spiritually stands still. Every man is either walking with his back to heaven, onward and farther from God, or he is walking with his face towards heaven, nearer and nearer to God, irradiated with its first sunshine. Which is our walk? What is our course? Is it retrograde? or is it advancing from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, till at length we shall appear before God in Zion? This walk will be as beautiful in the by-paths of private life as it will be in the high roads of public life. A Christian is like an anagram — read him backwards, forwards, upwards, or downwards, he is still the same: he has that balance of character, that inspiring Presence within him, that makes the right and true his very nature; and acts from those motives that, whatever he appears, or however he may be misconstrued, misinterpreted, and misjudged, in the sight of Him who sees the heart, he will be found and pronounced to be true, consistent, holy. That expression “walk” tells us what his life is. Where do we walk? On a road. And what is a road? That which leads to some home or rest. This life is the high and dusty road of humanity. Many a sharp flint is on it, many a storm will beat upon it, many a crooked winding is in it, many an uphill course shall we have to pursue; but, blessed thought, if we are on the road, we are on the way home. The longest road has an end, the darkest night has a morn; and they who are lifted up earliest

from the road are most favoured; and we who are left behind pilgrims and strangers are least so—or if not least favoured, it is because there are duties for us to do; and every man is immortal until he has fulfilled the mission that God has appointed him. Jacob, therefore, refers to Abraham and Isaac as his fathers, who walked before God.

Next, he passes from the ancestral relation to his personal experience and acquaintance with God; and he says, “The God which fed me all my life long.” But can the rich man, who has plenty to eat, say, “God feeds me,” as much as the poor man, who is dependent upon to-morrow’s sun for to-morrow’s bread? Is it true that the rich may pray what the poor most fervently pray—“Our Father which art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread?” Both need equally to pray it. When we ask daily bread, and recognise God as giving it, we simply recognise him as doing all that is requisite in order that we may possess that bread. Why do suns shine upon the soil? Why do rain-drops fall upon it? Why does not the heaven become as brass? Why does not the earth become as iron? We are so accustomed to see seed-time and harvest, that we fail to see God in both. If we were to see Him as the Apostles saw him, step from behind the curtain, and turn a few loaves and fishes into food sufficient for a multitude, we should see what we call a miracle. But there is as great a miracle in the corn sown, ripened, and placed upon our table, as there was when Jesus turned a few loaves and fishes into sufficient food for five thousand: only in

this last miracle we witness the actor step from behind the scenes, and visibly act; whereas in the seasons of spring and autumn, seed-time and harvest, we only see what we call secondary causes, and we fancy that God has left these as substitutes for himself. But it is not so. God is as much needed to work the world as he was to create it; and there is as much of God in the making of the corn-seed grow up into harvests of nutriment for man, as there was when He stood upon the circle of the skies, and said, "Let there be light, and there was light."

There are two things requisite in order really to have food. We not only need bread, but an appetite also, or the power of assimilation, to derive any benefit from it. There are many who have plenty of appetite and no bread; and there are nearly as many who have plenty of bread, and no appetite wherewith to eat it. It is a question which is the greatest calamity; but it is just as necessary that we should have the one as the other. Bread is not food; it is only the means of food; and I need therefore not only the literal bread, but I need that blessing with it which will make it nutriment to me; hence, I will still pray—and the richest and the poorest must still pray—"Give us this day our daily bread;" and then both will continue to praise by saying, as the patriarch said, "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day."

But perhaps the patriarch refers in this passage to a higher life, and a holier nutriment. Let us call to mind that magnificent sentiment, so rich in

suggestive thought, often read, too generally forgotten, but felt at seasons to be deeply true—"Man doth not live by bread alone." There is a higher life in us all. There is a hunger within us that earthly bread will not satisfy. There is a thirst that water from this world's wells will not appease. There are wants in the soul that time cannot fill; there are desert places in the heart that the sunshine and the rains of the sky will not freshen. We have within us needs that point to the necessity of something higher. Every man has learned in some period of his life, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." A time when we need that higher bread, and feel the hunger of that better life, is when we have lost, say a child, a brother, a sister, a husband, a parent. When death steps into the grandest mansion, it is forthwith, in the sight of the mourners in it, disenchanted of all its beauty and magnificence. The richest title sounds empty, the greatest wealth feels poor, and the weeper has within him a deep and a solemn impression that if this world and this world's bread were his all, he would be of created beings the most wretched. He therefore hungers for a bread that God does give, and for living water that God has, and has promised; and he learns that lesson which patriarchs, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and martyrs all felt and taught, that man doth not, and cannot live by bread alone, but by some-

thing higher, even every word that cometh out of the mouth of God.

Then, continues the patriarch, "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil." Was that Angel a created being? Dr. Wiseman says he was; and in his Lectures he cites this as a positive proof that the angels have a function to perform in the redemption of man. But it seems strange that to God should be attributed the lesser thing, feeding, and that to an angel should be attributed the higher thing, which is redeeming. But any one who will read the passage without any prejudice or prepossession one way or the other, will see that the word "Angel" is expletive, and nothing more. It is "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk—the God which fed me all my life long unto this day—the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads"—the nominative, "Angel," being expletive of the word "God." In other words, he calls God by the name "Angel." But is such an epithet warranted in Scripture? We answer, frequently. For instance, an angel wrestled with Jacob at Peniel; and he said, "I have seen God face to face." Again, in Exodus iii., the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the bush; and "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." But if we had any doubt or difficulty about this passage, it must be removed by another portion of Scripture; and there would be fewer disputes, if persons would use a Bible with parallel passages—for Scripture

always explains itself. We find in Hosea xii. an explanation of this angel: "He took his brother," that is, Jacob, "by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial." Thus, Hosea expressly asserts that the Angel who appeared to the patriarch, and with whom he wrestled—the Angel-God, who fed him, and redeemed him—was none other than the Lord God of hosts.

Let us look at the blessing which the Angel-God bestowed—"Who redeemed me." Do we all need redemption? Are we all slaves and bondsmen? Are we in any shape the serfs and thralls of another? What does the Bible say? That we are all born aliens, literally, under the curse. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Adam had a son in his own fallen and apostate image. It is a very humbling thing, but if it be true, we must accept the humbling influence of it, that from the loftiest prince in the land to the lowliest peasant child that was yesterday born, we come into this world inheritors of Adam's sin and curse. We need not stop to discuss the justice of it—it is easy to prove it from Scripture; we merely repeat the reiterated statements of that Book—that we are all born without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world; and the same Book tells us also that unless

we undergo a change the most complete that can be conceived, we can never see God in happiness and glory: for it says, "Except a man"—whatever that man may be—"be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

But how are we redeemed? He who was in the likeness of God, and was God, took upon him our nature, stood in our place, arrayed himself in our responsibilities, and said, if I might put an idea into words, "O holy and everlasting God, thou who art justly angry with all humanity, because all humanity have sinned and rebelled against thee, I take their nature, I array myself in its sins; treat me as the great human Transgressor, as the Representative of all that believe to the end of the world. The judgment they have provoked, let me feel; the penalties they have deserved, let me exhaust." He, the spotless Lamb, arrayed himself in the tainted fleece of our transgressions; and then he was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before her shearers is dumb, he opened not his mouth, and was offered up a propitiation, an atonement, and a sacrifice, for all who are willing to rest upon him to the latest generation, till things seen and temporal shall be no more. He died; therefore I shall not eternally die. He endured all I deserved as a sinner; therefore I escape. He obeyed all that I owed as a creature; therefore I am justified in him, and through him, and for his sake. And whosoever—the worst, the vilest, the most thoughtless, the most ungodly that can be picked from the streets of this great metropolis—whosoever will this moment let

the whole heart, with all its hopes, its fears, its ills, aches, and anxieties, repose upon that blessed Saviour, will have instant pardon, and entire acceptance with God. It rests not with us whether we shall inherit Adam's curse; but it rests with us this very day (and I say it with the deepest recollection that God's grace is essential to enable us) whether we shall be saved through the second Adam's merits. Not one sinner will be lost, except by his own wilful and wicked rejection of the remedy. When Jesus addresses the saints at the judgment-day, what does he say? — "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But what does he say to lost sinners? "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared" — not for you, but "for the devil and his angels." Then, how did they get there? Their answer will be, "We are suicides, we destroyed ourselves, we would not be saved, we loved sin more than God. Having sown to the flesh, we must reap a harvest of everlasting sorrow." Redemption is for all that will: ruin is also for all that will. If a man perish, he will have no decree to blame but himself. If one be saved, he will have nothing to thank but the grace of God alone. Thus God redeemed the patriarch. And it is added very beautifully, "redeemed me from all evil." In a Christian's lot there is no such thing as evil. There may be pain, there may be suffering; but that is not evil. Affliction is not evil to a Christian; pain, losses, and bereavements are not evils. There is only one evil in God's universe, and that is sin. Other

things may be sweetened, and sanctified, and made messengers of mercy, missionaries of love. But sin is essentially and entirely evil; and if we be redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we are redeemed from all evil: so that all that betides us shall be only sanctified to us. Life's greatest sorrows, like the dews that saturate the soil, shall only prepare the heart for the reception of the seeds of everlasting righteousness, which shall grow up into harvests of eternal peace.

Having thus thankfully mentioned all that God had done, he concludes with "Bless the lads," or, as we might translate it, "Bless the boys" — bless the children who are before thee.

Jacob owned that he had been blessed himself. The man who has prayed through life for blessings will, before life's close, have to praise God for blessings. We never asked a blessing from God that he did not either give or put something better in its stead. If we have asked pardon, sincerely and earnestly from the heart, in the name of Jesus, should it be in the heart's last pulse — should it be in the last moment of life's long day — if we have asked from the very heart, most assuredly we have obtained.

After acknowledging his receipt of blessings, he felt it was his duty and his privilege to bless others. Why is one man richer than another? Not that he may hoard more, but that he may give more. Why is one man stronger than another? Not that he may exact more, but that he may do more. God gives learning, distinction, power, not to be expended

in selfish and sordid monopoly, but for the nation's blessing, for the Church's well-being, for our children's benefit; and that they who are raised to the very highest spots on the earth may distribute most widely and in richest profusion the blessings they have so freely received.

Jacob not only wished blessings upon them as a Christian, but as a parent. A dying father feels the deepest and most thrilling interest in the children that he leaves behind him. Hence, the last words of the dying Jacob were benedictions upon Joseph and upon Joseph's children to the last generation. Nothing can be an inheritance worthy of the name, except it be blessed. Better a dying parent's blessing than a dying parent's fortune. Jacob felt that what he desired as a parent for those he loved as his children, God would assuredly bestow. He felt that they had the greater need of a blessing, as they were about to begin a new pilgrimage, to emigrate from Egypt, and to wander, they or their descendants, through the wilderness to Canaan. We need a blessing at the commencement of life's journey, and another at its close. Glorious thought! God's blessings are cheap as summer sunshine—they may be had by any one. God's mercies are free, full, accessible, for all that will—for there is no difference.

Let us ask ourselves, if we have reason to believe that we have inherited the blessing. It is first an inner thing—next an outer. We must observe, in reading the Bible, how rarely a blessing is pronounced upon learning, riches, estates—but how

ceaselessly it is pronounced upon holy character. "Blessed are the pure in heart." "Blessed are they that mourn." "Blessed is the man whom thou chasteneth." The mere carnal man said, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee;" but Jesus said, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Do we now inherit this blessing? If we have it, what will be its effects? Whenever God's blessing is in a man's heart, he is brought nearer to God. When there is no blessing upon a man's heart, he goes farther and farther from God. What was the blessing? "Come, ye blessed of my Father." What was the curse? "Depart, ye cursed."

Have we begun to pray, if we have never prayed before? Have we begun to read God's holy Word, if we have not read it before? Have we set to think about the soul, and the soul's great and irreversible destiny, if we have never thought of it before? The evidence that the blessing is on the heart is that religion, instead of being *a* thing in life, has become *the* thing; and that henceforth, whilst in the world, doing its duties, as lawyers, judges, physicians, merchants, and tradesmen, we are not of it. Our hearts will bathe in the brighter sunshine, and our affections will cluster round the home and rest of the soul, and we shall so think of that city that hath foundations, that we shall often wish we could anticipate the close of life's pilgrimage, and take wings, and flee away and be at rest.

Let us seek that blessing, first, on our souls. Pray that the blessing which the patriarch asked for his children may be upon your hearts, that you may be pardoned, and sanctified, and adopted as sons into the family of God. Let us seek God's blessing on our sorrows. Have you lost your property, a friend, or a relative? It is when man mourns under losses that the heart is soft and susceptible, as the earth when saturated with the dews. Unsanctified sorrows are the sharpest judgments of all. Pray, therefore, that God's blessing may rest upon the sorrowing heart, making its sorrows, whether for the loss of property or friends, or for other losses that humanity is heir to, to be the tear-seeds of joyous harvests, the spring-time of sowing what shall be a glorious harvest-home.

Let us seek this blessing upon our mercies. Some persons think that religion is an excellent thing for funerals, sicknesses, and sorrows—but they always long to get rid of it at bridals and joys. This is a gross and sad mistake. It is real religion that will make life's joys brighter and more beautiful, as well as assuage life's sorrows, and sanctify them to our good. Our religion is to make man happier than earth can make him; and when earth leaves him sorrowful, to give him a compensatory presence, that will make his very tears reflect the brightness of the everlasting rainbow, and himself, in life's saddest moments, to have its sweetest experiences. We need religion when we become rich, and great, and healthy, even more than when we are afflicted

and cast down. "O God," let us pray then, "bless us in our sorrows, bless us in our joys."

Let us seek this blessing as families. Here was a family group that as such sought a blessing. Should there be a single home that has not a family altar? What can be more beautiful than to see the head of the house kneel down at morning dawn, and at eventide, and as the priest of his family—which he is—pray that the God of Abraham, and Isaac, before whom they walked, the God that feeds us all our life long, that God that redeems us, would bless us, and cause the light of his face to shine upon us; and make us blessed, that we may indeed be blessings?

Above all, let us seek it in the prospect of a judgment-seat. It is not all men who live, like the patriarch, to the age of a century and a half. It is not all men who are spared till fifty, sixty, or seventy. When we think what frail ducts and channels the tide of life constantly rushes through, we are sometimes amazed that these do not oftener give way. When we think of the heart, with its thousand strings, each so minute and delicate, we are amazed that a breath of wind does not derange or disorder them. When I think that this heart, which beats in this frame, and is the fountain of the life that I now live, is constantly touched by the finger of God, in whom we live and move, and that if he were to remove his finger, it would stand still; and when I think that he feeds me, and prevents me from falling, while I forget and forsake him, I am constrained to pray, "O God, do thou

bless us ; make us worthy of thee ; help us to live to thee ; and may we, when life's long day shall merge in the shades of death's short night, find it is to rise, and join with the blessed, where all family groups of believers shall again meet, and where we shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the fathers and patriarchs of the world, and recount all the way the Lord led us, and so be for ever with Him !"

CHAPTER XII.

MISINTERPRETED PROVIDENCES.

"And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me."
—GEN. xlii. 36.

"Heart, be still!

In the darkness of thy woe,
Bow thee silently and low;
Come to thee whate'er God will,
Be thou still!

"Be thou still!

Vainly all thy words are spoken,
Till the word of God hath broken
Life's dark mysteries, good or ill,
Be thou still!

"Lord, my God!

By thy grace, O may I be
All submissive, silently,
To the chastenings of thy rod,
Lord, my God!

"Shepherd King!

Now thy fulness grant to me,
Still yet fearless faith in thee,
Till from night the day shall spring,
Shepherd King!"

EVERY syllable spoken by the patriarch was breathed from a broken and oppressed heart; and every assertion of the patriarch, however untrue it proved in actual history, was made sincerely and truly, because he believed it to be true. He looked,

on this occasion, like a majestic tree, stricken by the lightning, shivered to the roots, its foliage levelled in the dust. To use the language of the sufferer himself, his grey hairs were ready to go down with sorrow to the grave. But what Jacob uttered was not true; and it is because we are prone to give utterance to similar sentiments that we proceed to show that, in similar circumstances, they also are not true. He said, first of all, "Joseph is not." So he thought, so he believed—but how mistaken! Joseph was the prime-minister of the mightiest monarch, having under his jurisdiction and power supplies adequate to all the wants of Canaan. He said, "Simeon is not." He was there mistaken also. Simeon *was*, and was merely retained as a pledge, in order to guarantee what otherwise might have been insecure—the return of the nine remaining brethren to their father Jacob, and the supply of all their wants in the famine of the land of Canaan. "And ye will take Benjamin away," he thought to be destroyed—the nearest and the dearest one that he had; and Benjamin was taken away, but only to be the means of the introduction of Joseph to his father, of conviction and humiliation to the hearts of his children, and of joy, gratitude, and delight to the aged and venerable patriarch. The sequel of this most interesting history proves the truth of all. When Israel afterwards heard that Joseph was alive, he who had said, "My grey hairs will go down with sorrow to the grave," instantly burst forth into the joyous shout, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him

before I die." So contradictory were all facts to the fears and auguries of the venerable patriarch, that "Joseph"—who Jacob thought was not—"nourished his father and his brethren," who had given him up as a slave, "and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families." Thus we learn that every syllable which the patriarch uttered, and believed to be true, was not true; and that all these things, which did truly seem against him, were "all things," in the language of a corresponding text, "working," not against him, but "working together for good to Jacob, as they do still to all that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

Do not we, in the agony and excitement of transient circumstances, sometimes say, "All these things are against me?" Something happens unexpectedly, and the shock to the system is so violent, that the whole force and vigour of our minds are depressed, and under the deep despondency—a despondency with which all hearts have been incidentally familiar—we say, sometimes in anger, sometimes in solemn conviction, and often what we afterwards recall and repent of, "All these things are against me"—there is no room for hope, there is only ground of despondency, there is almost reason for despair.

Let us try to show what are the reasons of our thus misinterpreting the plans and the dealings of God. The first reason why we come to so desponding a conclusion in reference to God's administration of our affairs, and the affairs of mankind, is the

imperfection of our knowledge. Our greatest philosophers know far less than they imagine: but perhaps this is not strictly correct; for the greatest minds are always the first to admit the limits of their own horizon. We see very little, and that very little most obscurely. We know not the design that God has in view; we know not the reason out of which God's procedure emanates; we know nothing of the beginning of the chain, nor the staple that holds it, nor of the end of the chain, and the issue it has to accomplish. We see only the middle, and that middle refracted by the stream beneath whose waves we see it, and we misjudge and misconstrue. We see the spring rise in the bosom of the everlasting hill; but we know not what streamlets it will flow into, nor what mighty river it will mingle with, nor what ocean it will join and bury its waters in. Ruth deplored the loss of a husband, and no less the poverty of her lot; but the loss of that husband, and the poverty of that lot, were designed of God — certainly overruled of God — to be the means of her marrying Boaz, and becoming one of the illustrious progenitors of the Messiah himself. We see but scattered patches of God's sunshine; we read broken and fragmental paragraphs only of God's providential volume; we see the dark cloud, but not the benedictions with which it is charged. We behold the machinery moving backwards, forwards, horizontally, and vertically, and we think it must tear itself to pices; but all is so skilfully arranged, that it surely accomplishes God's great and grand results. Our imperfect

knowledge is one of the reasons of our imperfect and false judgments. It is not because God's plans are destitute of light, but because of our blindness. The sun shines beautifully into that dwelling; the stars stand over it keeping their watches by night; it is filled every morning to overflowing with the bright sun; but the inmate does not see it. Why? Because he is blind. It is not that the sun has lost its light, or that the windows are unable to transmit it; but because the inhabitant is blind, and cannot see the brilliancy of noon-day. Let us always remember the imperfection of our knowledge when we judge of the plans and purposes of God.

A second reason, and a common one, is the precipitancy of our judgments. We see the premises, and we come hastily to conclusions. But can anything be more rash than to see a brick laid, and then, being a stranger to prophecy, to pronounce whether it will be a palace or a hovel? Can anything be more hasty than to read the preface of a book, and then instantly to judge of its contents? We see but the preface of God's providential dealings, and we rush in where angels fear to tread; and not only pass judgments that are wrong, but enunciate prophecies that are contradicted by the rise of tomorrow's sun. "He that believeth," saith the prophet most truly, "shall not make haste;" and a Christian, humbled by a sense of the little that he knows, and aware of the rashness with which he rushes to decisions, will see that it is good quietly to wait for the doings of God.

A third reason of our false judgment is, we

judge carnally; that is to say, we make our present feelings the tests and criteria of the design and nature of God's doings. We say, "This is against me," because it feels or tastes unpleasant. We say, the medicine is bitter; therefore, not health, but aggravated disease, must be the issue. We feel the dispensation is painful to flesh and blood, which of course it was in Jacob's case, and may be in our case also; therefore, we argue, it can be accomplishing no good. Now, what is this but to make flesh and blood our rule of faith, instead of God's written and inspired Word? We are not to judge of the issue of a dispensation by what it tastes or feels, but by what God has pronounced it to be. And very often, instead of pronouncing on the dispensation at all, it is better to gather home our feelings, and concentrate them upon a discharge of the duties of to-day, leaving to-morrow's sun to awaken to-morrow's responsibilities, waiting for the salvation of God patiently, and so forming, not rash, nor carnal, but righteous judgments.

A fourth reason why we judge very wrongly and very absurdly of God's providential dealings is, that we judge very often atheistically. We calculate chances, and infer conclusions, just as if there were no God. We see the event of to-day, and we argue from that event what will be to-morrow. Exclude God from his own world, and we might well tremble every moment lest it should go to pieces; exclude the governing and ennobling thought that there is a God in all, controlling and regulating all — from the flight of an archangel to the fall of a sparrow,

from the crashing of a monarch's throne to the incidental fall of a hair from Jacob's grey head — exclude that grand thought, and the world is all chaos, and man's life is a tangled skein — it is confusion worse confounded. But introduce God into the world, and we shall be slow to judge of issues, the means and the management of which He keeps in his own wise and holy hand. Leave out of your calculations God, and you will judge, just like Jacob, "All is against me;" but bring into your calculations this grand thought, that God our Father is at the spring-head and source of all, and you have brought into them a key-note which will solve, explain, and harmonize all; and instead of discord, you will have harmony; instead of confusion, order; instead of seeing and fearing "All things are against me," you will feel that God is there, and that all things must be friendly to the children of so loving and so good a Father.

A fifth reason why we judge as Jacob did on this occasion is very humbling, but nevertheless true. It is the state of our health. It is certainly most humbling that some inattention to what we eat to-day is found to-morrow to affect our feelings — the brightness of our mind, or the sadness of our heart. The mind and the body, like two musical instruments contiguous to each other, are so constituted that if a chord in the one be touched, its vibrations are instantly felt or reciprocated in the other. God has so knit the mind and the body together, that they act and re-act upon each other. Who has not felt that his state of health gives a colouring to

everything that happens to him? One man, whose health is depressed, sees his own fireside, that used to burn so cheerily, only covered with gloom and sadness. Another, of a bright and a joyous mind, in the full vigour of health, will go forth, and the very desert to that man's eye will rejoice, and the very wilderness to his view will blossom as the rose, and the saddest strains in nature will sound to him the most joyous and brilliant. A sufferer goes out, and looks on nature; and its roses are all become thorns, its myrtles all look like briars, and Eden itself seems like a desert, and the sweetest minstrelsy of the grove and the forest sounds to him like a wild and wailing minor running through all the sounds of nature. Thus what we are, and what the state of our health is, very often governs what our construction of providence and creation will be; and, knowing this, just as sailors in distant oceans make allowance for currents, so in our interpretations of God's providential dealings we must make allowance for these, the incidental features, facts, and feelings of our common humanity.

But to view the matter in another aspect — suppose all things be actually against us, what are we to do? We should remember that the heavy rain which falls upon our country, and injures its crops, may be falling upon other lands, and creating golden harvests. This calamity, which so injures me, and which I cannot but feel, may be crowning another community with the most beneficent and lasting results. Because all things are against me, I am not to argue that all things are against all mankind.

And if all things be against me, what am I to do? Not to play the monk, who runs from the duties of society, professedly to escape its sins; nor to play the part of his brother, the suicide, who runs from the life of society, in order to get rid of its sorrows; both to find that they plunge themselves into a worse state than that which they have left; but we are to take the apostolic prescription, which is the true one, "Is any man merry? let him sing psalms. Is any man afflicted?"—are all things against him—"let him pray." And thus our mirth will bring us to God in praise; our affliction will bring us to God in prayer; and whether things be for us or against us, we shall come equally to our Father, who art in Heaven.

Again, if all things be against us, as Christians we may feel, during the pressure of these things, that there is One who never can be against us. Are you the children of God—true Christians?—and true Christians are not those that cling to a sect, or wear a certain dress, or bear a certain name; but all who look to God as a Father, and feel to him as children—who look to Jesus as the only Sacrifice, in whom God is seen to be a Father, and through whom He sees us children who are regenerated, not by baptism, nor by any ceremony whatever, but by the Holy Spirit of God. He who is so can ever feel—Should all the pillars of creation crash, should all the forces of nature play destructively against me, yet if I am God's, and God be mine, my reasoning must be that of Paul, in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, "If God be for us, who

can be against us?" And under that deep, earnest, and joyous persuasion, I can instantly begin, not to say—for that would be cold—but to shout and sing, "Who then shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who shall separate me from the love of God? Let all things be against me—if God be for me, I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, past, or to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, that is in Jesus Christ my Lord." Strong, not by the tenacity of my grasp, but by the omnipotence of God's; strong, not because I hold him so fast, but because he holds me so firmly and so faithfully to the end. "He that gave up his own Son, and spared him not, for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" To know this one fact is peace; if the worst come to the worst—if earth and hell, bad men and fallen fiends, should all be against us, if God be on my side what do I care? I must feel the opposition of men, or I should not be human. Stoicism is not the prescription of Christianity; but that feeling will be softened, and its sorrow neutralised, by the joyous and thrilling conviction that God is our refuge and our strength, therefore I will not be afraid.

When Martin Luther was told that the whole world was against him, what was his heroic answer? Because he knew that he had God's truth, he said, "Let the whole world be against me: I will be against the whole world." Because God was on

his side, he could say, "God is my refuge and strength; therefore I will not be afraid."

Do not argue from your afflictions to what God is; but argue from what God is to what your afflictions must be. Do not say, These trials, these visitations, are painful and disastrous; therefore God must be against me. But argue thus: God is my Father; therefore all that happens to me, whether I feel it so now or not, must be designed to do me good, and to give God also all the glory. We are to preface our interpretation of providence with this one thought, "Our Father, who art in heaven;" and if God be my Father, and if God is, rules, and reigns, then whatever happens to me his child, must have lain in his bosom, must be administered by his hand, and is therefore sent to me as chastisement to sanctify a son, not as a curse to crush and destroy an enemy. Poor human nature, ignorant of the Fatherhood of God, will cry in its agony, like the patriarch, "All these things are against me!" but sanctified and adopted human nature, conscious of its sonship, and of God being a Father, will say, "Because God is mine, therefore all things are mine—Paul, Apollos, Cephas, life, death, all are mine; because I am Christ's, and Christ is God's."

But instead of feeling that these things are against us, let us remember that afflictions, trials, and sorrows that happen by the way are the necessary incidents to a journey. We are all so prone, even the most thinking, to fancy that this little place,—so dear, so musical—justly dear, truly

musical,—home, is our real and our true home. It is not so ; it is no more our home than that “inn,” as it is called, under which the ten brethren took shelter at noonday was theirs. The fact is, human life is a journey. If this world were the end of man, he would be the most pitiable creature in God’s creation ; because the brutes of the field do not know what death is till they endure it, but man knows of death—he sees himself approaching to it, and he knows that every swing of the pendulum notches off a little more of that thing we call life ; and if he knew nothing beyond it, man’s state would be most miserable and wretched. But the true Christian is taught a better lesson ; he knows that this is not his home, but the journey that leads to it ; and that though the path we are walking on may be, as is the case with some classes of society, strewn with flowers, and may lead to a very pleasant and beautiful spot—still the noblest palace in the world, the grandest castle in the land is not a home, it is only an inn at the best, where we take lodging for a little, and, being refreshed, set the stout heart to the high hill with our faces Zionward and heavenward. As we move along the road that leads to our everlasting home, we find dropping here and there another and another, who is weary with the march of life—till at last the very milestones that measure the distance we have walked, become the waymarks of the graves that contain the dead dust that is dear to us.

But the grave is only the last step in the long journey—a step from mortality to immortality—

from grace to glory. And if this life be a journey, did you ever take a long journey in which you were perfectly free from cold, from storm, from wind? Did you ever pursue a long voyage that had no rough weather incidental to it? And can you expect that the journey which is the longest, and leads to the best and dearest home, will be without winds against you—storms that beat upon you—trials that stagger you—and afflictions that pain you? But do not say these things are against us. On the contrary, they are for you; for if these storms, winds, losses, and crosses did not befall you, you would settle down, and say, "This is my rest," and forget that you were a pilgrim and a stranger bound for a better and a more joyous land. We ought naturally to expect things to be against us, because we are pilgrims and strangers. But it is not the pilgrim robe that makes the pilgrim; it is not a surplice that makes a minister; it is not a coronet that makes a noble; it is not a pilgrim robe that makes a crusader. There may be a proud heart under rags; there may be a pilgrim-heart under royal purple. Let us feel that we are pilgrims and strangers, and outer circumstances will be softened by the feeling, they will not modify the feeling itself.

We ought, also, to look at all our trials in the light of eternity—all must issue in that lasting and glorious light in which there is no shadow nor darkness at all. And if we can only look at the face of time—not in the light of time—but in the light of eternity, we shall see it in a very different aspect.

Then the tears of the weeper will sparkle with the lights of heaven. The heart that was breaking will begin to bound. Crowns of thorns will carry in them the approaching and growing appearance of crowns of glory; and the very faces of the dead will seem more beautiful and holy, as we look at them in the light of that land where is throned the resurrection and the life, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the darkest night to a Christian will show that all is for him, and that in affliction there are springs and wells of comfort that are not always accessible in prosperity and gladness. When the night shuts down upon us, it conceals all the beautiful flowers that are upon the bosom of the earth—but it is only to open up a grander panorama upon the concave of the sky. And so, when affliction comes, and things seem against us, it is partially to dim and darken the glare of all that we delighted in—but to reveal to us in greater lustre God's great love, and our own future home, instead; and to teach us a lesson which we need to feel, that we are pilgrims and strangers, that this is not our rest, that a rest remaineth above the everlasting hills for the people of God.

Whatever happens to us, which we often construe to be against us, is never, if we are believers, penal, but always paternal. Now, the difference between these two words is the difference between real religion, and that which is sham, or its caricature. Penal sufferings are inflicted on an enemy, in order to punish or crush him; paternal chastisement is inflicted on a child, in order to sanctify and improve

him. God's punishments are never penal, as if we were foes, but paternal; that is, such as are inflicted upon his own children. But you might instance, as seeming to contradict this, the sin and punishment of David: "Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah, the Hittite, with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house." (2 Sam. xii. 7—10.) It is said this was punitive. There is no evidence of this whatever; for though his sin was forgiven, and God was his Father, his sufferings, because his sins were done publicly, were meant to show the kingdom over which he reigned that God visited sin in prince and in peasant; and David himself needed to be humbled, and led in the very outset to a sense of his transgression; and therefore God chastened him. And in the next place, if David's sufferings were penal, or punitive, or in any sense satisfying—if they were what has been called penance, that is, sufferings undergone in order to satisfy God's justice—it is plain they never did satisfy that justice; for the punishment was inflicted

to the very utmost, and David suffered even to the end. It is, therefore, evident that David's sufferings were chastisement. And it is not only plain from our arguing, but from God's own assertion. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" If David had been without chastisement, he would have been a bastard, and not a son. We build what we think the palace of a God—our Father interferes, and breaks it into a thousand fragments, in order to build a tent, which alone belongs to us: and thus all is paternal, and not penal—deepening our impression of sin, humbling us in the dust before God, and leading us to pray what David prayed in the 51st Psalm. Such treatment is chastisement, and not punishment—paternal, and in no sense penal or punitive.

Our afflictions, sufferings, and reproaches, are all evidence that we are in the right way. Who is most to be pitied? The man who never knew a sorrow or a trial, who lives in continual sunshine. No man can ever live in ceaseless sunshine—he must have shadow, or he will be struck blind. He who basks in sunshine, who feels not a trouble within, or a sorrow without, has the fewest seals of his sonship, or that God is his Father. But whenever we meet with things against us—trials, afflictions, crosses, losses, reproaches—what is the explanation? It is the livery of Christ's household; it is the token of our sonship and of God's Fatherhood. We are in the way of duty. No man in this fallen world can do his duty without paying the penalty for it. A

step taken in the right direction is sure to call up a thousand resisting and obstructive elements. And when Satan fails to oppose, by finding that he cannot overturn, even when he retreats he will fling reproach and calumny upon you; thus showing that he hates what he cannot hurt, and more truly and beautifully that we bear the seal and the signature of God's sons.

And, in the next place, our afflictions, even when worst, are meant to prepare us for a joy unutterable and full of glory. They are not only evidences of sonship, and of God's paternal relationship to us — not only evidence that we are in the right way, and that way the journey which leads to heaven — but they are also preparatory to everlasting joy and felicity. God pays most attention to the breaking of the soil in which he is to cast the most precious seed. Hence we shall find that our present suffering, sickness, sorrow, over which we have exclaimed in agony, "All is against me," will prove only the preparation of the land for the reception of those seeds that shall grow up in golden harvests; for it is as sure a law as that suns rise and set, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." There lies latent under the earth that has parted at the close of autumn with its outward magnificence, all the colors and the fragrance of the rose, the daffadil, the daisy, the violet—all the foliage of the elm, and all the gracefulness of the willow. These beautiful things are now under the black clod; they are waiting for a few sunbeams

and a few dewdrops instantly to burst forth, and cover all the pastures with beauty. So we now are in the winter, it may be, of life; the seeds are now hidden; but all heaven is in that man's heart, buried and invisible it may be, who is a Son of God, and who has God for his father. And thus our afflictions and trials are ripening and preparing us for that better rest that remaineth for the people of God.

And when the road has come to its end, how sweet will heaven be after the rough journey that we have passed! Is it not the voyager who has been months and years upon a stormy and a tempestuous ocean that enjoys most his quiet home? Is it not the traveller who has felt the roughness of the road, and whose feet are bruised by the flints with which that road has been covered, who enjoys most the calm of his own roof-tree? Does not the babe in the cradle sleep sweetest after crying? and will not the people of God feel heaven to have a brighter light, and its joys a richer taste, because of the troubles, the persecutions, the sickness, the sorrows, and all things they thought against them, which they felt and experienced by the way?

If these things be so, let us lay aside all despondency. A stout heart may possibly defy life's troubles and sorrows; but it is only a Christian, or a gracious heart that can say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls"—well, what is he to do? To say with Jacob in similar

circumstances, "All things are against me?" or is he to do as others have done in not worse circumstances, in a moment of derangement commit suicide? No; a Christian says, "Although all things are against me, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Stoicism can teach you to bear these things—Christianity can teach you to triumph over them, and rejoice in the worst of them all.

In other words, our religion is meant to cure the melancholy that the trials and the losses of life are fitted to produce. The religion of the Bible has nothing in it cloistral, sepulchral, monastic or ascetic. It is a religion that ought to create, and will ever create in the ratio in which it is felt, a joyful, a thankful, and a happy heart. The kingdom of God—that is, our religion—is defined by its author to be "righteousness," that is, character; secondly, "peace;" thirdly, "joy in the Holy Ghost." The very first effect of Christianity is to make men happy; its secondary but sure effect is to make men holy. The very first response to good news is gladness; the second and the sure accompaniment is holiness, thankfulness, gratitude, devotion.

And when death itself comes, which men fear so much, it should not make a Christian sad. Death is not against us. Because we are Christians, death, says the Apostle, is ours. What does he mean by that? He means that it is not against us. When you look forward to death and fear it, you stand upon Mount Sinai, instead of looking at it from the Mount of Transfiguration. The believer can either

meet death as a friend, and then he will welcome it, or he can look at it as a foe and defy it; and either in satire or in song he can say, "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." For in an aged Christian's death it is not he, but death that dies. Life is the prison—death is the kind friend sent by God to strike off the chains of mortality, to break the prison-doors, and to let the captive go free. Death is our exodus, not from life, but to life. The instant that a believer dies, he is in perfect happiness; and even before life is quenched in this world, the soul may often have been in heaven. There may be cases where the soul is in glory even before the animal life is extinct. We fancy that the soul and this animal life are identical; but I could conceive the animal life to continue while the soul by minutes, by hours, may have preceded it to glory. At all events, whether that be true or not—for it is but a speculation, not asserted in Scripture—this we are sure of, that death in the case of an aged Christian is only like a summer night in our northern latitudes, where the last rays of retiring day touch the coming rays of the approaching morn, with scarcely a night between. Blessed are such that die in the Lord: they rest from their labours.

The only anxiety that any man should have upon earth is, Am I a Christian, or am I not? Put that right, and all else will become right too. Set your faces in the right direction, and all things will fall into beautiful array, and follow you to glory.

Are we looking and waiting for heaven, and sure of it—not from anything that we have done, but solely from what has been done for us? Are we looking for heaven, and journeying in the way that leads to it, and bearing holy fruit, for that is inseparable from a Christian; but while we do so, trusting in nothing we have suffered, said, given, or done, but only where the greatest sinner and the greatest saint must trust, and are equally welcome to trust—in the precious blood that was shed for the remission of the sins of all that believe, that still cleanseth from all sin, and is still available to all sinners?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMFORTING ASSURANCE.

“Oh fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long —
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.”

“Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” — JOHN xiii. 7.

THESE words delineate the character of One who seems to have been so far typified by Joseph that he does what Joseph did—conceals his purposes, so that we cannot penetrate their meaning now; but He reveals to us what Joseph’s brethren also found, that what we know not now, what we are unable to comprehend as the mission of a providential dispensation now, we shall know hereafter.

When we look at that touching and beautiful history, chapter after chapter and section after section of which we have been studying, we see in the painfully interesting group a perfect type of what we are in the hands, and under the control, and amid the dispensations of a greater than Joseph, who is here. Jacob and his sons were introduced into a land that was the burden of a thousand prophecies—the land of Canaan: it was to be that sweet rest in which they thought they would be

under the wings of the overshadowing cherubim, and into which no pang should penetrate, no loss, or cross, or trial, should find a lodgment, even for a season. But they found that even in Canaan, the land of promise, there was famine. And have not we often so thought, and so felt, in reference to our position in this present world? Has not every man some time in his life built his paradise upon earth? and has he not said, or at least, has he not thought, Here I will rest, and in this sweet and sequestered spot I will enjoy the last years of my pilgrimage; scarcely expecting the frost to nip a blossom, or an autumn wind to bear away a single leaf? But what has been his experience? what has been yours? Either the lord of the paradise has been taken from it, or the paradise itself has been taken from him. Either its flowers have faded, or his health has declined. Some long-tended flower in it, he discovers, has a worm at its root; and even the majestic tree, that stood in the midst of it, is first shattered by the lightning stroke, and laid low in the midst of that rest which he had assigned to himself, and in which he had hoped to enjoy the length of life that God should give him. So all the patriarchs found. They entered into Canaan expecting it was a rest; they felt restlessness notwithstanding. And is there any one on earth who has not tasted joy in anticipation far sweeter than in possession? Has he not said, "If I could only reach this spot, attain that position, then I should be happy?" and he has found the only happiness he felt was in pursuing it, and that the possession of it

dissolved the charm; and that what he thought would be a grand enjoyment he takes now as an every-day necessity.

The patriarchs in this famine set out to buy what they were too happy to have the opportunity of buying, corn for themselves and for others. But when they arrived at Egypt, they found first that one must remain a pledge for the rest; next that Benjamin, the only remaining son of Rachel, the beloved of the patriarch Jacob, must also be retained as a pledge; they found next the darkness thicken, and the mystery become more involved, for money they did not steal is found in their sacks, and they have all the shame without the reality of being thieves and robbers. And as if this were not the acme of their sufferings, they find the missing cup in Benjamin's sack; and he whom they were anxious to shelter, and whom they would have ransomed with their life-blood, in order that they might avert the catastrophe of their father's grey hairs going down with sorrow to the grave, is proved apparently to them a guilty and ungrateful criminal. Light after light is quenched in their firmament, cloud after cloud is accumulated in their sky; the mystery becomes more and more perplexed; there is corn in Egypt, but they must buy it at ten times worse than famine price—shame to themselves, slavery to Benjamin, and death, with his grey hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave, to their aged and afflicted father. And have not we, too, found our brightest hopes sparkle on the edge of blackest clouds? Has not the heart, when it was bounding, been often

nearest to the moment when it was breaking? Have not our merriest hours been almost presentiments and prophets of our saddest ones? and what we thought would be all bright and sparkling sunshine has turned out unexpectedly to us at the time, and inexplicably to us under it, all shadow and darkness, the depth and the significance of which we could not understand? But, O blessed oracle! we can hear in the midst of it all, and read inscribed in the illuminated page in spite of all, "What we do not know now we shall, like the patriarchs, know hereafter."

Thus we see how the patriarchs, when they went to Egypt for corn, saw and experienced trouble upon trouble, cloud gathering upon cloud, and the meaning of the mystery becoming more and more inexplicable. We are in the same state. Thousands of things happen to every one every year, the meaning, end, and necessity of which he cannot understand. We are, in fact, here in a state where the light and the darkness, the sunshine and the shower so intermingle, that we must learn to wait where we cannot interpret. God calls us in these dispensations to be patient waiters; we in our pride or our folly would, if we might be, prophetic interpreters. But the whole picture of the patriarchs in their connection with Joseph is exactly illustrative of this. They were in the crypt underground, in darkness, and toil, and ignorance; but Joseph was on the upper floor, arranging all in light, order, and with design. They were actors in a drama the winding up of which they did not know; Joseph was the writer

of the drama, knew its first and its last act, and the necessary connection of the one with the other. So we are in the lower chamber or lower part of the great cathedral of life; but God is in the illuminated chancel: he sees all, understands all; he tells us he will not, to gratify our curiosity, interpret all now, but he bids us rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him; and what thou knowest not now, he has assured thee thou shalt know hereafter.

If we look into any department of God's government, we shall find it thus. Look, for instance, into the world of creation or of nature. Every day science is discovering new facts, extracting from the heights and the depths new phenomena. But the philosopher does not say, "I cannot see the use of this fact, I cannot understand the meaning of this discovery, therefore I will despise and reject it, or deny that it is a fact because I cannot explain it;" but he accepts what he discovers, lays it aside, and waits for more light and for growing progress, acting on the very maxim that he may not retain in his memory, "What God does I know not now, but if I wait, I am sure I shall know hereafter."

In God's providential government there is mystery, but there is also an issue. For instance, the comparatively recent discovery of inexhaustible fields of gold almost at the antipodes, is inexplicable to the most accomplished statesman at the present moment. They know not what will be its effect; but no doubt it is an augury of good, a prophecy of beneficence; and though we cannot understand it now, we shall understand it hereafter. In the

same manner, the tide of emigration that ebbs from the shores of Europe, and rolls with increasing wave to the distant and western parts of the globe has its mission, its significance, its meaning; and though we cannot see its bearing on the country that it leaves, or on the shores that it visits, it is for good—God reigns; and though we know not now, we shall know hereafter.

Who has not read of the imprisonment of the unhappy Madaiais, and other Protestants, whose groans have provoked echoes in the heart of all humanity—not to speak of religion and Christianity—we cannot see why it should be permitted, that for the *crime* of reading the Bible—and for the more terrible crime of venturing to tell others it was good to do so—persons of exemplary purity of life, and piety of character, should be clad in ignominy, and sentenced to a dungeon and hard labour for years. But it has its meaning. It is a link in a grand chain. Nay, the sound of the chains of the prisoners in Roman dungeons may yet mingle with the downfall of the system of ultramontaniam of which so many are the victims: and Europe may yet rejoice in after ages, because so many martyrs suffered, that God's name might be glorified, and God's truth receive new impetus. Of this we are sure—that truth does not die with its advocates, that God is not dethroned when his martyrs suffer; and that out of their dungeons, and from their ashes, have come the seeds of golden harvests—theirs the toil and agony of sowing, ours the joy of bearing the harvest-treasures home. We are not

always competent to pronounce judgments. It is beautifully said of charity, that it is "slow to judge." And when we know how ignorant, and frail, and biassed we are, we should be slow to judge of facts or of persons; we should bear all things, believe all things, hope all things—think no evil, rejoice not in iniquity, but in the truth. This is the winter of life. No man looking upon the earth in winter can ever dream of summer. Who would think that under the black clod, covered perhaps with a winding-sheet of snow, and hardened by the ice, there are all the blossoms, the beauty, and the magnificence of approaching summer, waiting for the first sun-beam to awaken it, and the first dewdrop to refresh it? So, we can scarcely suppose that under so many trials of so much mystery, pain, and suffering, there should be hidden many bright and inexhaustible benedictions. But it is so; and though we know and see it not now, we shall know and see it hereafter.

But these thoughts lead us to notice the circumstances in which the remark of Jesus originated, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Jesus had just given a gleam of his own approaching glory; and he descended from the height of honour and greatness on which he stood, to the lowliest act of ministry and service in which man could be engaged. Jesus did not think the least things unworthy of him. He, on whose shoulders was the government of the universe, and on whose soul lay the heavier burden of a world's transgressions descended from the Mount of Trans-



figuration to Calvary, the mount of suffering—from proclaiming and setting forth his glory in all its magnificence, to the lowliness and the humility of a servant, washing the disciples' feet. Christ may be acting where we cannot see his footprints, or hear his voice. He may be amongst his people, though his people may not be able to see him. We so judge after sense and sight, that we think there is only real worship where there is splendid pomp or parade; and that there is only real religion where there is much noise; and that there is only a Saviour present, where the whole firmament glows with his splendour, and the whole earth shines with his glory. But this is not God's way. He is not in the fire, he is not in the exploding earthquake; he is in the still small voice, which needs the circumcised ear to hear, and the Christian heart to feel and recognise. The patriarch could say, "The Lord is in this place;" but so few were the material evidences of his presence that he adds, "and I knew it not."

Whatever Christ offers it is pride, not real and true humility, to refuse. Many feel thus, "I dare not ask that Saviour to blot out all my sins at once; it seems too presumptuous." Humility is shown in doing whatever God commands; pride in hesitating to do it, because we think it too good for him to give, and too great for us to ask. It may be too great for us to deserve, but it is not too great for him to bestow. We are not to think, when we pray, so much of our demerits as of his majesty, mercy, and goodness, who giveth liberally the largest things, and upbraideth not.

The work of Christ in the midst of his people is hidden, and the mystery of his proceedings impenetrable to them, because they cannot see the purpose which God has in view in placing them in circumstances of trial, of suffering, or unexpected difficulty. But because we cannot see his purposes, we are not to refuse the control and the government of his hand. Where we cannot see the design which He means to accomplish, by stripping one man of all his property, by laying another man on a sick-bed, or a dear child in the grave, yet He has a purpose, and it will thus be accomplished; and though we cannot penetrate his motive, it is because of our blindness, not because of his weakness, or of his having no grand purpose when He thus acts.

We are often puzzled in God's providential dealings, in so far as we cannot see the necessity of them. A Christian says—and it is most natural on his part—"Why should I have lost my health, when a whole household is dependent on my labours? Why should I have lost that near and dear relative, whose life was bound up in mine? Why should I have all my property swept away? I cannot see the necessity of it." But because I—poor, erring, blind creature of a day!—cannot see the reason of the acting of infinite wisdom and Almighty power, am I therefore to murmur? Upon every stroke there is a needs be written; in every visitation that pierces the heart there is a mission of beneficence, as well as an absolute necessity. The stroke will not be too heavy, nor too long, nor too often repeated, as Satan would like it; and it will

not be too short, nor too light, nor too seldom, as flesh and blood would like it; but it will be, as our Father sees to be, the best chastening of his erring but beloved Benjamin.

Another reason why we are perplexed and puzzled is, that we cannot see the issue to which any trial is leading. We say, What will be the end or issue of this? And because we cannot see far enough along the vista of the impenetrable future, we cry, as the patriarch cried of old, "All things are against us." We cannot understand it. When we look upon the world, we say, "All seems a surging chaos." But what looks to us chaos, is only the mingling of the elements under God's control—each element taking up its place by a mysterious and inseparable affinity of order and beauty, till the whole creation will rise into a house not made with hands, a temple of beauty and light, whose Builder and whose Maker is God. When we are inclined to murmur, let us always recollect that God is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.

We are puzzled, and often disposed to murmur and complain, because we cannot see the excellence of God's works amongst us. We only hear the crashes, not the harmony beyond. We do not see such excellence, beauty, or perfection, as would indicate the presence, or prove itself worthy of the majesty, of the Great God. But this proceeds from our vulgar taste and poor apprehension. An uneducated mind, or a child, would think the gas-lamps upon the streets far more splendid than the

stars in the sky. A common mind cannot see beauty except there be glare; whereas the rightly-educated mind, not to speak of the Christian mind, can recognise the highest magnificence where there is the least pretension. Nay, to a Christian's eye, Jesus was covered with a richer glory when he bore that cross to Calvary than when he said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Greatness never appears so magnificent as when it becomes lowly. It is only the truly great that can afford to be truly humble. But we are so accustomed to misjudge, that we fancy because greatness does not approach us in splendour, and pomp, and magnificent parade, there is none; and so we fail to see the excellence that is moral, because it is not materially magnificent and imposing. But all moral things are great—all material things are poor in comparison. An assembly of a thousand or two thousand Christian hearts, loving God, praising his name, gathered together to hear his word, and to listen to his Gospel, is a church more majestic in the sight of heaven and of angels, than all the cathedrals of mediæval Europe, even in their brightest glory: for if Solomon, in all his glory, was not to be compared with a flower of the field, still less is man's mightiest work, man's grandest temple, to be compared with the temple of the Holy Ghost—the house not made with hands, the believer's regenerated and sanctified heart.

God has reasons for not letting us know now what he will reveal to us hereafter. One of these reasons is—to show that he is God. Most men never can

do a thing without showing a reason or an object for it. It is only the most illustrious character that can bear for six weeks to be misinterpreted and misunderstood. Very few men can bear it. We always hasten to explain ourselves — not from high motives, but from vain ones. But the few and far between can bear to be misinterpreted for a year, knowing that the explanation that follows will only be more splendid. God is great; he bears with our misinterpretations; he waits patiently to the end; and the close reveals the presence of a God, and so reveals it that we are humbled because of our repinings, and willingly give greater praise, and glory, and honour, to Him who is throned on the riches of the universe, and worketh all things after the counsel of his own sovereign will.

God hides his plans and purposes from us in order to show us our weakness. Our intellectual weakness we need not learn, but our moral and spiritual weakness we need to learn. And after years of misinterpretations, fears, and misgivings, when the end comes we see how impatient, how repining we were — how we fretted ourselves where we ought to have reposed unwavering confidence, how we misjudged and misdoubted; and, like Joseph, we come forth from the trial when we apprehend the close of God's providential dealings, humble and lowly, laying ourselves in the dust, and putting our hands upon our mouths, and saying, "Unclean, unclean! God be merciful to me a sinner." David is a specimen of this. When he saw the wicked prosper and the good laid low, he said, "Surely God has forgotten his own people;"

but when the issue came, and he discovered the end of it all, he said, "I was as foolish and untractable as a dumb animal before thee."

Such dispensations as these are meant to strengthen and invigorate Christian graces. Patience is needed. The Apostle says, "Ye have need of patience." Courage is the mission of a few; patience is the duty of all. Courage is most beautiful before men; but the patience that sits quiet at Christ's feet, and bears meekly Christ's rebuke, is far more beautiful. And when we see such trials, and are placed in the midst of them, unable to explain their meaning or to unravel their mystery, knowing nothing of their purpose, object, aim, or issue, we learn to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. And our faith, too, is strengthened; that faith which believes God is there, though we see him not. And obedience is strengthened; for the command is, "Do what I bid you. Do not ask the reason of it, but do it." And hope is strengthened; for we learn to hope to the end. And ultimately thankfulness is invigorated; for we learn to praise Him who has wrought all things so well. It is thus that in those dispositions which are covered with clouds and darkness—the meaning, purpose, and issue of which we cannot comprehend, but the presence of which we truly feel—we learn to know ourselves, and to know God; and we are schooled in those Christian graces which are not indeed our titles to immortality and glory, but the evidences and the proofs before the world that we are the children of God, and like our Father in heaven.

But it is said that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. The Apostles could not understand the meaning of many of Christ's words when they heard them; but in the course of a very few days he explained them at greater length, and they thus knew and understood them. At other times it is long after. Look back on your biography — take a retrospective view of the windings of your private life, of all the broad and trodden highways of your public life — and you will find things which puzzled you at the moment, and made you almost doubt if there was a providence, or if the end would be happy; but as you look back, you find that if that link had not been, the chain had been broken — that if that incident had not occurred, your present state had been altogether different. Men remark proverbially, "The turning of a straw determines a destiny;" but God is in the turning of the straw as truly as he is in the destiny itself. God is in the least things as well as in the greatest. He superintends the hair that falls from the head, the sparrow that drops on its wearied wing, as well as the angels that are about the throne, or the cherubim that are in the sky. We discover in after-life that if God had left out the little things, in our biography, the great things that we now enjoy never had been our possession. What God was doing then painfully to us, we now know he was doing well for our good, and for his glory.

We often learn at death the meaning and the mystery of much that has befallen us. When the body begins to drop from the soul, it seems as if

the intercepting medium of its communication with eternal and glorious realities was more and more removed. It seems, in a dying hour, as if God then lifts a nook of the grand curtain that conceals a glorious eternity from our vision, and gives the dying a pre-libation and a foretaste of the approaching glory, that their last moments may be sustained and strengthened by the brilliant hopes and bright prospects which are before them. It seems as if the soul, as it retreats within itself, and the outer senses become less able to be the vehicles of its volitions, holds intenser communion with the Fountain of Life, and sees things really and brightly in a dying hour, which it did not know and could not understand in the busy and tumultuous hours of everyday life. And hence the Christian often discovers on a death-bed, a meaning in things he could not comprehend in the active hours of life. We must all lie down upon a death-bed, and come to that dying hour; and blessed will it be for us if, at that hour, and at that trying moment, we can say, as Simeon was able to say at his—"Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." The dying Jacob saw upon his death-bed the Shiloh he had not seen so clearly before. David could say, in a dying hour, what he could not say in a living one—"Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." (2 Sam. xxiii. 5.) And many a sick-bed has been made the scene of a conversion to God, that never would have occurred if that sick-

bed had not been, and that nearness and certainty of death had not been so vividly realised. We are not to put off the thought of God, the privilege of prayer, the duty of hearing the Gospel, the blessedness of communion with God, to a dying hour; but if, at the eleventh hour—if, at half-past the eleventh hour—if, within minutes of the stroke that begins eternity and closes time, the dying one can see Christ as his only Saviour, even then and there is instant pardon, instant happiness, and instant peace. We underrate the goodness and the mercy of that blessed Saviour; we fancy there is on his part a reluctance to give, what we most reluctantly, often, and suspectingly pray for. But he rejoices, at any moment and at every moment, to hear the criminal's last cry, to receive the dying one's last breath, and to take to his bosom, and make it the subject of his everlasting benediction, the soul that has given itself to every one and everything, except to religion, to God, and to eternity. To act upon presumption is to turn grace to licentiousness; but to find acceptance in the hour of dying, is only to make known the riches of the grace of Christ.

And another time when God reveals to us the meaning of much that he has been doing, is when we come into the house of God. In the sanctuary, God manifests himself in another way than he does unto the world. All know well that there is in the spoken Word a power to teach, to comfort, to strengthen, to cheer, in life's journey, that there is not in the written Word. There is power in the living man speaking to living men; and when one

speaks from one's own heart's feelings to those who are giving at least their ears to listen, there goes out a power that the most obdurate will feel, and that God has blessed so often and so richly, to the salvation of precious souls. The Bible is the great storehouse of the living seed—the better corn than was in Egypt; but preaching is the wind that takes the seeds, and scatters them, till they are deposited in waiting hearts, and in good soil, and these grow up into harvests, in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some a hundred fold. And, apart altogether from the power that is in the living voice, explaining with freedom precious truths, there is—promised and pledged by God himself—a blessing to accompany the word spoken in weakness; and to make it to many a savour of life unto life, even life everlasting. So David felt. When he saw the wicked prosper; and the pious cast down, he said it was too painful for him. What God was doing he knew not then. But he found out the meaning of this providence. He understood it when he went into the sanctuary. Ever as you are perplexed and puzzled by providential dealings which you cannot understand, if the preacher speak not to you individually, but utter grand truths from this grand pharmacopœia for ignorant and unenlightened minds, some precious truths will reach you, and give light in your darkness, or comfort in sorrow, or peace in trouble; and what you know not in the outer works of the world, you will know as you come hereafter into the sanctuary of God.

And very often we learn in distress and in trouble

what we did not know in health. God often teaches us in the sequestration of sorrow and of trial what we did not know in the bright and sunny hours of life. We all need trials. We do not like them when they come—it would not be flesh and blood to like them; but there is no man who can bear to live in perpetual sunshine; all need shadow—deep shadow. No man will ever live with safety to his soul in the stir and bustle of ceaseless public life; he needs the quiet hours, when the shades of evening fold him in their soft embrace, and when no eye sees but God's, and no ear hears but God's. He needs those hours of retirement and quiet, that he may calculate his route, examine his credentials, and see whether, in the prospect of that great eternity whose waves are coming on every moment, like the waves of a great Atlantic sea, he is prepared to set sail, and find himself in the haven of perpetual peace.

Whatever be your experience of the providential dealings of God—however painful—whatever they may be at the present moment, exercise trust in him. Where you cannot see, trust. John could lean upon the bosom of his Master, while he could not sound the depth of love that was there. We can lean upon an Omnipotence we cannot scrutinise; we can trust in God, whose way is in the depth, and whose paths are in the great waters. Let us trust in him. As a patient submits to a painful operation, because the skilful physician says it is necessary, so let us submit; and let us not so much submit but bear it, not only patiently, but

triumphantly, in prospect of the end and issue to which it leads. This faith, or trust in God, will be greater riches than all the mines of Australia; it will be a presence as if the cherubim were over you; it will be a security better than moat, and tower, and battlement, and bulwark. You will be able to say, as the great Reformer said, "God is our refuge and strength: therefore we will not be afraid." And when all above you is darkness, and all beneath you is barrenness, you will be able to sing, if you will but only trust in God, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." You will thus have peace, while greater and mightier men have trouble. Even in the stormy and tempestuous night, when the greatest trees have been uprooted, and palaces have been swept away, the butterfly has found sweet shelter under the leaf of a lowly plant, and is ready on the coming day to sport itself in the sunlight. Many a true believer finds shelter and shadow in the exercise of this simple trust in Jesus, when those who have sat upon thrones have felt the shock of dread revolutions, and mighty dynasties have been swept away as straw huts before the floods of God's righteous judgments. Trust in the Lord. "Ye believe in God"—ye trust in God—"trust or believe also in me." But you say, "Trust! How can I?" What! Can you trust the Bank of England—can

you trust a brother, a friend, a parent, and not trust God? Are you not ashamed to say so? Not trust God! the good, the gracious, who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have eternal life"—cannot you trust him? Try. He bids you trust, just as he bade the man with the palsied hand hold it out. The man might have said, "Hold out my hand! I have no control over it;" but instead of objecting he did as enjoined. And when God says, "Trust," do so; and the consciousness that unless it be inspired you cannot trust, will prompt the prayer, "Lord, I do trust: help my distrust;" and He who sees your humility, and hears your prayer, will answer you and bless you.

And, wherever you are, you can always pray. What is prayer? Not repeating hundreds of paternosters, according to beads upon a string. That is not praying; a parrot might do that. One "Our Father," rising from the heart's depths, is worth all the paternosters that ever were chaunted, chimed, or sung. Prayer is not beautiful words, it is not many words; it is the look, the appeal, the yearning of the heart, which God hears, and sees, and knows. The most earnest litanies have been lifted up on sea-shores, and the truest liturgies have been said upon the deck before the shock of conflict, and upon the field of battle, when great armies met to determine a nation's destiny. Prayer is the trust of the inner man. It is not the lip, but life within that prays—so silently, that an angel listening can-

not hear, but so truly that the great God answers, and blesses abundantly.

Finally, wait on the Lord. Joseph's dungeon was not so dark that he could not pray; he could not work, but he could fold his hands and pray. Wait and rest in the Lord patiently. That dark shadow, through which we must all pass, is the vestibule of everlasting life. Blessed thought—those we have lost are not really lost, they are only gone before! A very thin partition-wall separates us from those we loved, and whose images only we retain in the picture-gallery of memory. They are not lost—they have merely gone up a little higher. They who should weep are those left behind; they who are gone are now rejoicing. It is difficult to feel all this; but the problems of this world are the axioms of the world to come. What we know not now we shall know hereafter. Earth is the birth-place; heaven is the eternal destiny. There is much in the experience of us all to humble, but there is nothing to make us despond.

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

“Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace —
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

“His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour ;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

“Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain ;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GUILLESS ISRAELITE.

“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”—JOHN i. 47.

THE portrait of the Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile, is drawn from that great original source of all true and real portraits, the Word of God. An Israelite, according to ancient definition, was a descendant of Jacob or Joseph, according to the flesh. To be a child of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, was to have genealogy so clear and indisputable that there could be no doubt or difficulty in determining that the pure blood of Abraham rushed through the veins, and that without taint or alloy from Gentile source, or any other, there was a son and a child of Abraham. The Jews thought that this was all that was requisite; and to preserve the physical descent untainted was in their judgment to preserve their relationship to Abraham in all its purity and fullness. They had to be taught another lesson: that it was possible to be the descendants of Abraham physically—to be apostates from Abraham really; that they might have a succession from that illustrious patriarch, according to the flesh, so plain that every link of the chain that connected the last child of Abraham in the days of Jesus with Abraham in the land of Ur might be

specified as it was laid down in the public tables of the nation, and yet this was not being in the high and true sense an Israelite indeed. It was being an Israelite, but it was not an Israëlite indeed. To constitute the latter, there might be no genealogical relationship to Abraham, yet if there were no sin indulged in the heart, no guile uttered by the tongue, no crookedness deforming the life, but true trust in Him whom Abraham saw from afar, and rejoiced to see—he might be born in Italy, in Athens, in Gaul, in Britain, in Ultima Thule—he was a child of Abraham and Jacob, a true Joseph; and all heaven will recognise him when Abraham's children, true and guileless, shall be separated from Abraham's pretended family, who have alike guile, and sin, and crookedness in their hearts. Our Lord recognises this distinction, and frequently insists on it, as is obvious from such passages as these:—when they said, “We be Abraham's children,” our blessed Lord instantly replied, “If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” In other words, the test and criterion of being Abraham's children, in the true and guileless sense of that expression, was to do the works of Abraham. Is it straining the passage to add, that to have the true apostolical succession is to preach the doctrines and imitate the lives of the Apostles? and that if it were possible to trace the descent of ordinations from 1856 up to the days of Paul, of Peter, or of John—and not only is it impossible, but it shows great ignorance in those that pretend to it—he is nevertheless the right successor of the Apostles,

who preaches apostolic doctrine, lives an apostolic life; and such only are recognised in the judgment of Him who said—what would to God all churches more felt — “If ye were Abraham’s children, then ye would do the works of Abraham; for he saw my day, and rejoiced when he saw me, and was glad.” That this spirit and distinction has been also imbibed by the Apostles is plain from the words of St. Paul, who says, “They are not all Israel who are of Israel;” in other words, they that have the literal physiological descent have not the true patriarchal and Christian descent. And again, in his reasoning with the Romans, alluding to the Jews’ boasting and descent, he says, in Romans iv. 13 — “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” — “through the righteousness of faith;” and, therefore, they that have this righteousness, which is by faith, are the lawful and legitimate children of Abraham. So again, in the Epistle to the Galatians iii. 7 — “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” And in the last verse of the same chapter he adds — “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Now you have only to translate, or rather to transfer, this very phraseology to some of the proudest pretensions of ecclesiastics in modern times, to conclude that they are the children and the successors of the Apostles who trust in the Apostles’ Master, who believe the Apostles’ inspired word; for if we be

Christ's, we may rest assured we hold the doctrine of the Apostles—nay, higher still, the doctrine of the Master of the Apostles, in whom alone we trust, and through whom alone we look for grace and glory.

Having noticed this distinction, let us try to show what are some of the traits of an Israelite indeed—a child of Jacob or Joseph, in whom is no guile. The preliminary requirement in such a character is that he should, in the language of the Apostle in the Epistle to the Galatians, have faith in Christ Jesus. “They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” “If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's children.” It is quite plain, therefore, that the very first link that unites the Christian to Abraham—and when I speak of Abraham, I speak of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, for the Israelites were called so after one of these patriarchs, which was merely a minor classification in their great descent from Abraham, the father of us all—is that he should have faith in Christ Jesus as his only Saviour; that clear, simple, but impressive conviction of our own ruin by sin—our ruin derived as well as done, inherited from Adam, and aggravated personally by ourselves; and that clear, distinct, apprehension of Christ as bearing our sins, as carrying our iniquities, as the Lord our righteousness, as our only ground of trust, as our only title to heaven, as our only password from time to eternity, from grace to glory; to have which deeply rooted in us, whatever be our distinction or our position—moral, social, ecclesiastical, political—in

this world, is to be a Christian. We lie upon one dead level of ruin by sin; and to be able to look up from that dead level to the sunny and table-land where Christ stands, our Priest, our Advocate, our Sacrifice, our all and in all, is salvation. The man that thus feels, and is thus convinced, may be excommunicated by councils, or anathematised by pontiffs, but yet he is an Israelite indeed, and all heaven will recognise him as such. The foundation doctrine of Christianity is "The Lord our righteousness;" and the foundation feature in Christian character is faith in Him as such.

A second feature in an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile, is, he will show his inner sonship, or relationship to Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, by his outer life and conduct in the world. The grace of God is not something for ostentation, for that is most unchristian; but for manifestation, which is most Christian. We are not to parade our Christianity, and make people come and admire our orthodoxy; but we are to let our Christianity preach for us, and speak through us; so that men, not listening to us, as some read it, but taking notice of us, see that we have been with Jesus. Some people read these words as if they meant that men *hearing* us may take notice we have been with Jesus. But no; it is that men *seeing* us may take notice we have been with Jesus. It was said of a gifted and eloquent orator, in ancient times, that he did not speak himself, but he let reason speak for him: it may be said of all true Christians, they do not speak themselves, but they let the life of God in their

hearts speak eloquently and impressively for them. If, then, we are the children of Abraham, we shall show something of Abraham's character. Read the life of that great man, or rather good man, so praised, and to be held by us so high—not to be worshipped, not to be looked to as a mediator, but to be remembered as a saint by grace, once a sinner by nature—and what do we find of him? That God told him in the land of Ur that he was to go to a country which he knew not—the nature, the soil, the climate, the products; the people of which he knew nothing of. And what did he do? Did he remonstrate? Did he say, "Wait till I go and bury this one, and make that little arrangement?" No; Abraham no sooner heard the mandate than he went forth, looking for a country which God had promised to conduct him to. And if we are children of Abraham—if we are true Jacobites, true Josephs—we, too, shall be satisfied to do the most difficult, and to venture upon all man dreads, and to forsake all man loves, if we can hear from God's lips, or, what is equivalent, read in God's Word a clear commission to go forth and do his bidding, and follow his holy and his great will. The Israelites of old were separated from all the nations of the earth that they might be a peculiar people, zealous of good works. A Christian is thus separated from the world; as they were a model nation, so the congregation of Christians ought to be a model people. The world ought to be able to look at us, and be able to say, "How justly these Christians transact business; how kindly and affectionately these Christians live and hold intercourse

with each other!" But if churches—as they have unhappily been too much characterised—quarrel and war with each other about church government, and forms and ceremonies; if Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas thus quarrel, can you wonder that kings, and czars, and autocrats—unenlightened by the Gospel—seeing such specimens of its peace, follow the worse example in preference to the better? The world will never be made better till the temperature of the Christian Church is raised much higher: it has not yet that copy to imitate which it should have. Not that we expect perfection; there will be no perfect Church till the Great Husband of the Church comes; but we might be better, at all events, for we are not what we should be. Let us strive to rise to a higher level, and to exhibit to the wide world, each in his place, and all in their relationship to each other, the models of what the world should be. We ought to be the salt of the earth, the lights of the world—living epistles seen and read of all men. The Israelites of old were a people specially in covenant with God. How often they are thus spoken of! Christians are so; and the nature of that covenant in which we are, is very beautifully expressed by Paul, when he says, "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel"—that is with the Israelites indeed, for of such he is speaking—"after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." Now that is the covenant under which we are—a covenant whose details were

to be carried out by Levi, but whose characteristics are these: God is our God, and we are his people; his law is written, not upon tables of stone, but upon our hearts, and we love him because he first loved us. There is nothing fuller than such a covenant. God says to every Christian, "I am thy God." The Christian responds, "I am thy son, thy child, thy worshipper, thy servant." When one says to you, "I will be to you a physician," it means, "I will use all my skill to do you good;" when another says, "I will be your advocate," he means, "I will exhaust all my eloquence in pleading your cause;" and when another says, "I will be your friend," it means, "I will do everything my resources enable me to do you good." And when God says, "I will be your God,"—what a magnificent thought!—"my omnipotence will be at your service; my omniscience will be your counsel; my pardoning mercy is yours also;" all that God is, is at a Christian's service when God is his God. And when you say, "I am thy son," it is a covenant; it is a mutual and reciprocal compact; and what should God expect from that? "O Lord, as thou art to me a God, and at my service as God, I am to thee, and will be to thee, thy servant and thy son. My property is thine, not mine. My relations, my children, my relatives, my influence, my power, are all thine, in response for what thou hast made mine. Take thou or give thou; and whether thou takest or whether thou givest, I will equally say, Blessed be the name of the Lord." Now when a Christian feels sure of this relationship, and can really act upon it, what a

happy man must he be—to know that, however things look, all the attributes of God are encompassed around him, and at his personal service! Such a thought either is absolute blasphemy, or eternal and inspired truth; it can be nothing between. We rejoice to know it is everlasting truth; and we may lay the stress of all our future prospects upon it, and not be afraid. The Israelites of old were the worshippers, and, as a model nation, they were constituted the worshippers of the true, the living, and the only God. They often lost the spirit of this, but the words, the truth itself, they never wholly lost sight of. They always recognised Jehovah, though through temptation and infirmity they attempted, in one instance, to represent him; and, in other instances, to give deference to the gods of the heathen. But take that nation as a whole, there were two things which they seem to have nationally kept up—the integrity of the Old Testament, and the unity of the one living and true God. And so, if we are the children of Abraham, if we are Israelites indeed, one of our distinctions will be, worshippers of the only living and true God. The ancient national cry was, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God;” ours is, “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Now this is a distinctive peculiarity of a Christian in contrast with a heathen, a Mohammedan, a Gentile, or a Romanist—that he is a worshipper of God only. The ancient Jew worshipped in one place, and worshipped outwardly; the modern Christian, the “Israelite indeed,” feels the place

where he worships of no consequence ; the language in which he worships of little importance ; and the form or ceremonial by which he worships immaterial. The true worshipper of the true God is the heart ; in all service, God says, "My son, give me thine heart !" Give him the most splendid music in praise, give him the most gorgeous liturgical service in the sanctuary, but there is no worship if you withhold that which is essential to all true worship — the throbbing of a heart that loves, adores, and blesses him. Many times, no doubt, there is truer worship on the streets of London than on the consecrated pavements of cathedrals ; nay, more fervent prayer has been offered on the heights of the Alma or Inkerman, in the Crimea, by soldiers now sleeping beneath the green turf, than ever was offered in those grand cathedrals which men of artistic taste so admire, that they have become the victims of a degraded and a soul-destroying superstition. Never forget that worship is not a church thing, nor a chapel thing, nor a ceremony, nor a form ; it is the heart lifting up its thoughts, its aspirations, its thirsts, its desires, its sympathies ; and seeking from God only, in the name of Christ only, mercy to forgive and grace to help in the time of need, for such God seeketh to worship him.

The ancient descendant of Abraham, or the Israelite, always approached God when he worshipped him — the only living and true God — by sacrifice, by a high priest, through an altar, in the holy of holies. Now thus we, too, approach God by sacrifice, with our offerings laid upon the Altar, and

rest on the mediation of the one true and only High Priest. It is not true, as some charge us, that in the modern Christian, or Protestant Church, we have no altar, no priest, no sacrifice. We have all three; but then we have such a glorious three, that we have no need for the miserable pretensions to them that are consecrated and canonised by others: our altar is Christ, our sacrifice is Christ, our high priest is Christ; and because we have an altar that covers all space—a sacrifice whose efficacy is inexhaustible during all years—a High Priest who can be present in ten thousand congregations at one and the same moment, and hear all their prayers, and present them in the golden censer of his own perfect intercession; therefore, we do not want a priest so-called in the congregation visible, a sacrifice so-called in the midst of the sanctuary, an altar so-called in the chancel of the Church. The truth is, the modern Christian Church is all chancel, and the Christian laity are the priests; “for he hath made us priests unto God.” “Ye are,” said Peter, addressing the tradesmen, the merchants, the lawyers, the physicians, the rulers of Jerusalem scattered throughout the world, “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a chosen generation; to show forth the praises of him who hath called you from darkness into his marvellous light.” When the ancient Israelite prayed, he always looked towards his temple. We remember that beautiful instance in Daniel, where he opened his window, and three times a day prayed towards the Temple of Jerusalem. But why did he do so? Because that temple was the place

where the symbols, the types, the prefigurations of Christ were. Because the ancient Israelite prayed, looking to the temple, therefore the true Israelite must not pray, looking to the temple; for the end and object of the temple is come, for Jesus has said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up"—speaking of the temple of his body. Therefore, when we pray, we are not to look east or west, or north or south, as if the quarters of the compass had any consecration; but wherever we pray, we are to look by faith at Christ the Mediator; and thus praying, we look to the only temple, and present our offerings on the only altar, and claim the intercession of the only High Priest.

A feature of the Israelite indeed, and a sure mark of him, is persistency and perseverance in prayer. The reason of referring to this, which seems almost unnecessary, is, that the very name dates its origin to such a persistency in prayer as will take no refusal. In the twenty-fourth verse of the thirty-second chapter of Genesis—"Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And the angel said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thou shalt be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast pre-

ailed." You see the origin, therefore, of the name Israelite. The angel was the angel of the covenant, the Son of God, there is not the least doubt, from the very language employed—Israel, "one that has power with God." The origin of the name of Israelite was one that had power with God, who would not cease praying till he had obtained the blessing. Then, a mark and feature of every Joseph, or son of Israel indeed, is, that he is a man of prayer; that he asks and asks again, and asks still the least blessing that he needs, and the greatest that he cannot do without, until he obtain it. It is not meant to say you are to spend the day in praying instead of attention to the duties of life; or that praying "always" means praying all day long, as monks have interpreted the passage, till at last prayer with them has become a form; but that every day, and in every action, and on all occasions, in which guidance and direction are needed, you should lift your heart to Him—blessed thought!—who sees the winds and hears the beatings of the humblest heart, and beg him to guide you, to bless you, and to teach you. Most remarkable it is that the models of prayer given us in the New Testament, in every instance, are short prayers. We used to think, before we knew better, that the Lord's Prayer was a very cold and naked formula; but when we understand it, we come to think it the most magnificent, the most comprehensive, the most precious formulary of prayer that ever fell from the lips of the Son of God, or could have been given as a model for the prayers of God's people. You

will find everything that you need in its clauses; and the man that does not *say*, "Our Father," but can *pray* "Our Father," as that prayer was first prayed from the lips of Jesus, his incarnate Son, is an Israelite indeed — one that prays and persists in prayer till he is blessed. A very remarkable instance of this, is the woman of Canaan, who was refused, and yet clung to him — rejected, and yet prayed. Read it at your leisure, in Matthew xv. 22.

The true Israelite felt that wherever he might be, he yet was a pilgrim and a stranger in the land. It was one of the marks of Abraham, that he went forth a stranger, a pilgrim, and a sojourner, looking for a city that hath foundations, and for a better country. Now the true Christian, whatever be his position in life, will try to realise this. We often think, when we see proud or gorgeous circumstances, that there it is impossible to feel as or to be a pilgrim, a stranger, and a sojourner; and because we so think of those who occupy the highest places, the re-action of our thought is as others conclude, when they see that bare-footed, filthy, and miserably-clad monk, that he must indeed be a pilgrim, and a stranger, and a sojourner on the earth. The fact is, it does not follow that the bare-footed Passionist is really a pilgrim, a stranger, and a sojourner, though he looks so; and it does not follow that the royal and princely personage, clad in all the splendour of circumstance, is really not a pilgrim, a stranger, and a sojourner. Ah! more pride has often been found under a cowl than ever was found under a crown; more of this world has often been

embosomed in sanctimonious phraseology than ever was contained in the unvarnished statements of the men of this world. It is not outer circumstance that makes one a pilgrim; it is not outer-heard words that show one is holy: it is here again the heart. The pilgrim heart may beat in a royal bosom; the worldling's heart may beat under the monk's cowl. Let us feel that he is a pilgrim and a stranger, in the truest sense of that word, who learns what one would think the greatest would not be long in learning—that there is nothing in this world that can give us satisfaction, not anything. What seems to us a luxury, is to the possessor of it a necessity. It is a law that we have all experienced, more or less—that what shines in the distance as a great enjoyment, looking at which we think, “Oh, if I could only reach that point, then all would be right—I should be happy then; all my cares and fears would be dissipated,”—is not so in possession. God suffers you to reach it; and what then? you begin to feel how utterly empty it is, and to crave and yearn more than ever for a sparkling point far beyond, that stretches in the distance of the future still. The fact is, there is no such thing as happiness—real happiness—to be gathered from the world; it may be had in spite of the world, but it cannot be plucked from any garden, the fairest in this world. And he who has come to this conclusion, and looks beyond it and feels, “My home is in the future, my inheritance is before me,” is a pilgrim in the truest sense of the word. Not that he does not take interest in the things of the world; not that

he does not sympathise with all that occurs in the world. It does not follow that we are never to think about this world, because our supreme interest is in the next. There is no such thing in God's world as going mechanically out of the world, in order that we may thus live for another world. A true Christian eats like other people, drinks like other people, dresses like other people, reads the newspaper like other people, does the duty that devolves upon him in his profession like other people; and as far as these matters go, we can see no distinction in him from the rest of the world. But there are, underlying all these, links and bonds of sympathy with a better world; thoughts and aspirations that leap from the heart like sunshine, and indicate the heirship of an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled. And when the contest whether he shall serve Christ or Mammon overtakes him, his decision is not a protracted discussion, it is intuitive, it is inspiration—he takes up his cross and follows his blessed Master. Thus, an Israelite indeed is a pilgrim and a stranger in the truest sense of that word. And he looks for a better country. Let us put it to any one, the most favoured in this world's circumstance—Can you suppose that this world, as it now is, is meant to be our home, or that we are to be in this world for ever? It is clear as daylight, to any one looking impartially upon the world as it now is, that something has gone so wrong with it that we cannot be its everlasting tenants, till it has been put in tenantable and thorough repair. That the world has gone out of

repair is as plain as any one fact upon earth; and that we never can be on it always, or it be our home, till the great sea Lord, and land Lord, and Creator, and Governor of all, has restored all things, is abundantly clear. Then what is our position? We are looking for a city that hath foundations; we are looking for a better country; we feel that there remaineth a rest for the people of God. This was the inspiring hope of the pilgrims of the desert; it must be ours also. Our pillar of fire is the brightness of the Father's glory; our march is under the arrangement of that prophet of whom Moses wrote, and our certainty of success is only equalled by the magnificence of the eternal Canaan, to which we are journeying. And rather than we should want, the rocks will give us water to drink from their stony bosoms; the clouds will become the waggons that will bring us food to eat; the sea will be cleft in twain, and all will work for good, that we may not feel weary with the march of life, or miss the everlasting Canaan on which our hearts are set. Such then are some of the plain characteristics of a true Joseph — an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.

Nathaniel, the Israelite indeed, was, and every Israelite indeed may be, the victim of very great prejudice. When Nathaniel was brought to Jesus, what did he say? "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" That was his notion; it was not a crooked sentiment, but it was an old and honest prejudice that clouded the mind even of an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. The natural heart

is enmity to God; but even the regenerate heart may have many prejudices in relation to God. Many—it is to be hoped not many, but some—Christians will say, if one should tell them, “I heard in the Scotch Church an excellent, instructive, and useful sermon:” “What! can any good thing be found within the domains of Presbytery?” and others again, with an equal prejudice—for prejudice is not the monopoly of the Church of England—will say, when they are told of some excellent ministry in that Church, “What! any good thing come out of Episcopacy? That is impossible!” But what are these but prejudices? There are good men in all denominations, and bad men also; and the longer we live, the less we shall quarrel about churches, and the more we shall feel that this is true churchmanship; ay, and high churchmanship, because it is Christianity—to be an Israelite indeed, whether Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Independent, or Wesleyan, in whom is no guile.

The true plan to have prejudices dissipated and scattered is, not to quarrel about them. The best way to expel prejudices from another’s heart is to preach to that heart the catholic and blessed Gospel. What was the cure of Nathanael’s prejudice when he said, “Any good thing out of Nazareth! How could you believe that?” The simple words are given us in the Gospel. Philip findeth Nathanael, and then, when he said, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.” Now that is the proper answer. When you say, “Is it possible that the truth can be in that

church? Is it possible that the Gospel can be there?" Come and see. But above all, it was not "Come and see a church;" it was not "Come and see a chapel;" it was not, "Go here, go there; and go over all the ecclesiastical economy of the world, in order to find out that every one has the Gospel;" but "Come and see, not the church, but the Lord of the church." The way, therefore, to get rid of prejudice is to bring the person that is prejudiced nearer to Christ; and the clouds of his prejudice will all dissolve in the beams of that blessed and glorious sunrise — all his inveterate misconceptions and misapprehensions will melt in his presence; and it will always be found eventually that the deepest Christian is the least bigoted; that where the life is spent most in the light of Christ, there the judgment is the least biassed by prejudices among mankind. Not that we shall get rid of all; prejudices will go with us to our grave. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves:" one might paraphrase it — "If we say that we have no prejudice, no passion, no imperfection, no misconception, we deceive ourselves." There is no such thing as a perfect character upon earth; the model is always beyond and before us. The mark of a Christian is ceaseless approximation to it; but his growing and deep conviction is, that there is no man that sinneth not; and the more we know ourselves, the more we shall be ready to pity, to sympathise—not to censure and condemn.

The true stand-point from which to see most clearly is Christ Jesus. When we see all things in

his light, all fall into their just and true proportions ; but when each person makes himself the central object, and looks at other things in his own peculiar light, not only is the light bad, but his own shadow is projected into everything, and all is squared and estimated by it. But if we can take our standpoint upon catholic ground, if we can look at all things in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ—preferring our own system, but looking high above it, and seeing something far greater and better—then all things will be put into their just and proper proportions ; and we shall learn to love indeed the communion we may prefer, but to love higher than the communion—the Lord to whom it leads ; and after all to conclude, that as that is the best tree which bears the most fruit, that is the best ministry and the best church in which you get the greatest good and the most instruction as pilgrims and strangers, “looking for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

One other lesson we may here learn : the joyous and happy thought that, however misapprehended we may be by men, there is One that does not misapprehend us. Nathaniel said to Jesus, “Whence knowest thou me ?” what did Jesus answer ? That he saw him when he was under the fig tree. And when Nathaniel heard this, he instantly exclaimed, as if conscious that this was the inspection of Deity, “Thou art the King of Israel ; thou art the Son of God ;” in other words, he recognised him as God. What a joyous and yet humbling thought is this, that Jesus sees and estimates every heart, as if that

heart alone absorbed and engaged all his omniscient inspection ! What a blessed thought that the misapprehensions of others do not cast their shadows into heaven ; that Jesus sees exactly our sorrow, our want, our difficulty, our grief, our character, clearly, distinctly, without a misapprehension or a mistake ! When poor Hannah of old prayed most fervently for her Samuel, and her lips gave utterance to her thoughts more rapidly than usual, Eli, the high priest, thought she was intoxicated, and said so. That was ecclesiastical decision : but Christ saw her, and Eli learned afterwards that it was the fervour of her petition for her child which explained the strange excitement of which she was the subject. Here is an instance of the misapprehension even of a high priest ; but he that judged her was God. We may be misapprehended ; but, blessed thought, there is One that seeth and knoweth us ; and if we should ask, like poor Nathaniel of old, " Whence knowest thou me ? " Jesus will answer not in the language of rebuke, " Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee ; " and we too shall respond, with joyous emphasis, " Thou art the Son of God ; thou art the King of Israel. "

The special truth selected here by our Lord for special commendation was Nathanael, an Israelite indeed, without guile. We find in the New Testament that the greatest sinners that were brought to Jesus he frankly forgave, and without an angry word, though always with rebuke of the sin. But of all characters who came in for special reprobation by our blessed Lord, the hypocrite was most

prominent. The only occasion on which our blessed Lord used language of unsparing severity, was when he addressed those hypocrites who made sanctimonious phrases take the place of doing justly and loving mercy; who turned their religion into a trade, and sought ecclesiastical preferment in the nation by broad phylacteries, and long robes, and seeming to fast, that they might be thought the very saints and excellent of the earth. Jesus rebuked these most sharply, and richly did they deserve it; for of all offences upon earth, that of hypocrisy is the most abominable. Rather let us see the man whose indiscretion is palpable, but the indiscretion of a transparent mind, than the mere pretender to religion, or the hypocrite, who wears a mask, and lives in secret a life sinful in the sight of God, though hidden from mankind. We do not say—far from it—that sincerity is an atonement for error, or that to be without guile is an expiation of indulging in sin. We have heard persons use the expression, “I may do this, and I may do that; but God knows I have a good heart, and am very sincere.” To say they have a good heart is an utter mistake; and if they really had a good heart, and were always sincere, this would be no atonement—sincerity makes me always love the person that is sincere, but it cannot make me call his sin virtue or his error truth. Truth is not what one believes to be true, but what is true; and holiness is not what one believes to be holiness, but what is holiness. If we wish to know truth, or to ascertain conduct, we must appeal to that Blessed Word whose decision is

conclusive. But it is very interesting to notice that this Israelite indeed was praised especially for one feature which our blessed Master applauded in its place — namely, that he was without guile, that his outward life was the perfect reflection of his inward life, that the inside of the platter was as clean as the outside. Sincerity, connected with truth and righteousness, crowns and consecrates the character; though sincerity connected with error does not make the error truth, while it makes the victim of the error worthy of our compassion and our pity. Give men that are sincere all the credit that is justly due to their sincerity; but do not the less let them know that error is dangerous, and that sin is ruin.

We have thus seen an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. Are we so or not? Are we aspiring, thirsting, desiring to be such? It is a noble and a most consolatory thought, that the desire to be what we should be is the commencement of being what we should be. No man ever truly desires to be truly holy without being already started on the road that makes him so; no man desires truly to repent who is not in that desire already repenting—for the very desire of grace is grace; and He that has implanted the earnest wish expressed in the prayer — “Make me, O Lord, an Israelite indeed, without guile,” has already set you upon that road which begins at the cross, and terminates only at the crown.

CHAPTER XV.

LESSON FOR YOUNG MEN.

“Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.”—TITUS ii. 6.

JOSEPH is a model for the young. In his patience, in his victories over temptation, in his steadfastness of heart and purpose, he is a singularly perfect example. If any lesson be appropriate to the young, it is the prescription of sober-mindedness.

Man is fallen. He is at war with himself. He despairs where he ought to hope; he presumes where he ought to pause; he is excited and borne away by impetuous passions where he ought to hold him still, and be sober-minded. But there is in this Book a leaf from the tree of life for all the ills, the aches, the sores, the sorrows of humanity. There is a prescription in this pharmacopœia that meets all cases. And if any one remain spiritually diseased, or spiritually dead, it is not because there is not a cure — but because he loves the tomb in preference to the sunlit temple, and the habitations of corruption rather than the homes of the happy and the holy-living.

What is meant by this prescription? Sober-minded is the same epithet applied to the mind which is applied to the body when it is in a state of perfect health. The Apostle asks the young not to remain diseased in heart or in mind, not to indulge

in fevered or unhealthy excitement, when there are all the elements of cure in this Book; and all the promises made by God to cure the sick and quicken the dead, and make all what they should be, holy, sober-minded, and therefore happy. In looking at this prescription, let us notice, first, the negative side, or what we are not to understand by being sober-minded; and next, the positive side, or what we are to understand by it, and how we are to attain a grace needful for all, but emphatically useful and appropriate to the young.

When the Apostle, guided and inspired by the Spirit of God, bids you be sober-minded, he does not wish you to be melancholy. There is no reason, in the whole compass of Christianity, why a man should be melancholy for anything that is in it, or because of any influence that it can exert upon him. You may take melancholy views of religion, but these are not scriptural. The tendency of every statement in this blessed Book is to give man happiness on earth, and happiness in heaven; and in proportion as the influence of the Gospel spreads over the world, will its gloomy deserts be wreathed with smiles, and its darkest jungles be lighted up, and its wildernesses blossom as the rose. There is no more merit in a melancholy or rueful countenance, than in a sparkling one—nay, the latter is a nearer approximation to the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus. There is no sin in a laugh—there is no merit in a groan. It is what the heart is in the sight of God that He regards; and whether we smile or weep, if our hearts be right in his sight, it is well.

Nor is there any prescription on the part of the Apostle here that we should be dull, dead, or insensible to all the bright and beautiful things in the world that is around us. Some people seem to think that Christianity means always reading the Bible (and you cannot read it too often), but never looking on a bright flower, or gazing at a brilliant star, or studying a pebble, a plant, or science of any kind: such is not Christianity. It is right to study God's works; it is only more imperative and yet more delightful to study God's Word. It is right that we should see what God in his wisdom, love, and power has done outside; it is only vital that we should hear what God in his redeeming love has written inside the Bible. We are not, therefore, called upon to be insensible or dead to all that is about us.

Nor are we called upon to cease to be men. The old error of the middle ages was that men took angels for their models. The monks thought that angel-life was the true type, and that the nearer they lived to it the holier they became; but the result was the very opposite. We have nothing to do with angels; angels have only an errand to us, for they are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." We are to live as men, but as Christian men. The Gospel does not require us to exterminate feeling, passion, love, hope, joy, sorrow. In no text of the Bible is it written that in proportion as a man's heart approaches the granite rock does he approach to godliness. In no page of the Bible are we told that the

stoic who fears nothing, or the cynic who sneers at everything, is the type and *beau ideal* of a real Christian. We may weep only as if we wept not; we may rejoice only as if we rejoiced not; we may use the world only as not abusing it; we may marry only as though we married not; remembering that the fashion of the world passeth away. Some passions in the human heart Christianity requires to be exterminated, some passions it requires to be sanctified; indeed, most of our passions are only sinful in their perversion, and Christianity appoints the appropriate channels in which they are to flow. The prescription of the Apostle, therefore, is not that we should cease to be men in order to be sober-minded, but that we should feel as sanctified and Christian men. Jesus wept and had sorrow; Jesus rejoiced and had joy; Jesus was angry. Anger is a passion implanted in Adam when he was made in Paradise, and you are no more at liberty to exterminate anger, if you could, than hunger. There is no more sin in being angry than in being hungry. But when anger degenerates into hate, revenge, malice, then the beautiful blossom has become perverted, corrupt, and poisonous. Jesus was angry, it is said, on one occasion; but it is added, as the softening and determining element in that anger, "being grieved at the hardness of their hearts."

The advice to the young to be sober-minded is most important for the following very plain reasons:—The young are in that season when they are very apt to be carried along under a sort of intoxicating feeling. They are, as it were, in the morning of

life. The great black clouds that overshadow the decline of life have not yet appeared to them, and under the dominant excitement of feelings just awakened to life by the rising sun of the day, they are apt to be hurried along without thought, impetuously approaching danger as if they could defy it, till, like the summer moth in the evening candle, they plunge into the midst of it, and are destroyed. Knowing that this is youth, that the intoxication of thought, mind, and feeling is peculiar to youth, and that the motive and regulating power of the mind at this age are not possessed of that strength and vigour that they will afterwards attain, it is most seasonable to exhort the young to be sober-minded.

Let us recollect also that in youth the animal part of our nature is prone to be most ascendant. In old age the thoughtful and the reflective take the helm, but in youth the mere animal impulses are apt to be most violent, as they are the most powerful; and these animal impulses it is that in Satan's hands, and tainted and perverted from their right tendency by sin, precipitate into wretchedness, misery, and crime. There is no doubt that sin at first is pleasant. It is most foolish to say to a young man that the indulgence of all his passions is, in one sense, not at least momentary gratification. The first steps are amid flowers, the first impressions are only fragrance. It is delightful to flesh and blood to sail down the stream, and to have no trouble, but to float onward with Hope at the prow and Pleasure at the helm. Every passion is so far gratified and gratifying. But there is a reckoning

for all this. All experience testifies, all Scripture asserts, you yourselves know, that the excessive and sinful pleasures you have tasted in youth you must pay, even if there be nothing more, a heavy penalty for in the approaching days of old age. There is not a doubt—it is useless to deny it—the syren's song is exquisitely musical; but she lures the voyagers to the rock. No doubt the syren's cup is exquisitely sweet; but it turns the man into the brute as its inevitable tendency. There is no doubt that the first burst of passion indulged and gratified, whatever it may be, is most exhilarating; but if you can only pause and remember that the issue of these things is death, you will see with what seasonableness and wisdom the apostolic pen writes the prescription, "Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded."

But the very expression "sober-minded" reminds me of another truth. "Sober" is here applied to the mind, but it may also be applied to the body. "Be sober," or do not indulge in stimulants that would affect unnecessarily the body. Teetotalism, whether it be applicable to all men or not, is very applicable to youth. You have so much fervour and youthful feeling that you do not need stimulants. These stimulants, when not required for health, will only add fuel to a flame within that burns too fiercely already. It, therefore, seems to me that the less alcohol the young make use of the better; and if they join the Teetotal Society, apart from its demerits or merits in other aspects, they certainly will incur no great damage, and they may

derive great good. The prodigal first left his house, then he wasted his substance in riotous living or drunkenness, and then he spent his money with harlots, until at length he lived and ate husks with swine. It may, therefore, be implied here that, as a general rule, you are to flee intoxicating drinks when not required for your health. We know that the beginning may be easily arrested; but when we have given way, there is no calculating what the issue may be.

But if it be necessary to be sober-minded, it is also duty to avoid everything in the shape of the gambling-table, whether it be betting at horse-races, or at elections, or about the stocks; for gambling does not mean shuffling pieces of paper called cards: you may gamble with a button or a halfpenny; you may gamble at a horse-race or on the Stock Exchange. When men gamble, it is calculating that by a lucky stroke they may gain a grand fortune. Lunatic asylums, coroners' inquests, and suicides, are the natural, we may almost say the logical results of such a course of life. Recently, it is grievous to notice in the papers, gambling has been indulged in its very lowest and vulgarest aspect. There are daily instances of young men who have lost their situations, apprentices thrown adrift upon the world, in consequence of betting; and of our prisons being filled with the victims of those miserable dens into which the young are beguiled and made the prey of cunning, depraved, and experienced vice. Let me ask you not only to avoid this, but to avoid everything that partakes of the spirit

of gambling in any shape. He, for instance, is not a gamester, but he lives very much in the same spirit, who, having no patrimony from his fathers, determines not to engage in the very vulgar thing, as it is thought, of working with his hands or his head, but to look about him in the hope that something may drop into his lap while he waits. Such a man lives upon what may turn up; he lives from day to day, not upon God's bounty, but upon vicious chance. He forgets God's great law, that if a man will not work he shall not eat; and instead of building bricks upon the ground, he, in the spirit of gaming, builds castles in the air, and hopes that something will occur that will make him rich at one bound, and prosperous without toil. This is living in the spirit of the gambler, if it be not indulging in gambling. Every man should do something for his bread. Labour is not dishonest; it is not vulgar. One has a far profounder respect for the humblest labourer who carries mortar to the bricklayer in the streets of London, but who loves his Bible, and brings home his wages to provide bread for his children, than for the greatest noble who lives beyond his means, and does not pay his debts, and then goes out to fight a duel rather than submit to the imputation that he is not an honourable man. It is not rank that makes the man, but character. The stamp is only the mark of currency; the gold is the substance that is truly valuable. Trade, business, labour, are not discreditable. Adam and Eve worked in Paradise. There were no weeds to gather, but there were leaves that fell—one race

of leaves succeeding another in rapid succession. They were made to labour; they were put in the garden to dress it. Instead of labour being dishonourable, it is one of the remains of Paradise in its beauty and magnificence; and when you labour with your hands or your head, you are the more to be respected; for no man deserves more respect in this world than he who pays honourably his way, and owes no man anything, but to love one another.

This grace of being sober-minded will guard you against rushing into responsibilities in a crowd, into which you would not rush were you left to consult your own individual feelings. In the present day we all know that things are done by corporations that never would be attempted by an individual. A presbytery will do what a bishop would not dare to do; and if you ask who did it, each member will say, "It was not I; it was the presbytery." The councillor will say, "It was not any particular person there, but the whole corporation that did it." Men, therefore, will do things in bodies which they never will do as individuals. They may be most sober-minded in their own counting-house, or behind their own counter; but the instant they become members of a corporation or committee, their sober-mindedness goes, and they plunge into extravagances and inconsistencies they would otherwise shrink from. A mob is like a mountain-torrent hurrying with reckless force onward to the main. We must never lose a sense of our own personal responsibility; and what we would not do as individuals, let us not do

as members of a committee or of a society, or as constituent members of any corporation. Let us carry a sense of responsibility into every sphere, and be sober-minded, not only in our homes, but in the world and everywhere.

Another prescription for being sober-minded, is abstinence from reading the trash which is published now, and sent round in the circulating libraries, called novels and romances. Very few of them are worth reading. The day of the best productions of the kind has passed away. And what is the use of them? It is of no use joining a Teetotal Society if you belong to that most intoxicating circle, the subscribers to a fashionable library, who are drinking in worse than alcoholic stimulants from novels, and romances, and idle tales, all the day. What alcohol is to the body, novels and romances are to the soul. True, it is easy for some to give this advice, who enjoy no pleasure in reading them. I tried to read through the purest novels that were ever written — Sir Walter Scott's, but two or three volumes wearied me; and for the simple reason that a sense of unreality haunted me; I was conscious of reading the manufacture of mere fancy. Allison's History of the French Revolution, or his History of Europe since the Fall of Napoleon, one could read night and day, because it is fact, and we feel that we are reading truth. But do not abstain from reading the productions of the poet. Sometimes a beautiful thought, such as often occurs in Longfellow's exquisite poems — exquisite with all their faults — will last me a whole day as refreshing food for the

mind. What can be more interesting, what more beautiful, what more encouraging to young men than this thought: —

“Lives of good men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime;
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.
Footprints that perhaps another,
Sailing o’er life’s solemn main —
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, may take heart again.”

Such thoughts as these are stirring and stimulating to the heart, and are meant by God to be so. But there is a wide difference between reading thoughts that are interpreters of nature, and novels and romances that are the creations and manufactures of whims and fancies. The poet is the interpreter of what God has said and done; the novelist is the manufacturer of a tale to stimulate and excite the soul and intellect. It is too evident that the habit of reading novels will grow the more you indulge it, until at last the pulse of the soul will beat at fever-heat, and you will have wrong apprehensions of everything above, around, and beside you. The habit of novel-reading is one of the explanations why the habit of Bible-reading is not so universal as it should be. You live upon stimulating intellectual diet, and you cannot come down from the transcendental region of the novelist to tread the plain and every-day walk of the inspired penman. You have ceased to be sober-minded, because you continue to live on intoxicating mental drinks.

But in order that you may be sober-minded, let me urge you to remember, that now is the season of sowing, and that after years in this world, or in the world to come, will be the season of reaping. What you sow in youth, depend upon it, if you are spared to seventy, you will reap in old age. The crop you sow one year is what you will probably reap amid tears and agonies the next; and eternity will be the ceaseless reaping of the seed sown throughout the whole period of your life upon earth—they who have sown to the flesh reaping corruption.

“The way of transgressors is hard.” This is a plain text, but a very true one. There is a law just as sure as gravitation itself, that the path of sin leads to growing and accumulating misery, unhappiness, and woe. Our hospitals, penitentiaries, and almshouses, are, it is quite true, the creations of beneficence; but it is no less true that they are the signs and evidences of the hard end of the way of transgressors.

Let me ask you, also, to remember, in order to cultivate this grace, that in all you do, whether as individuals, or as members of corporations, the great governing rule must be God's holy law. Set out with this principle. This thing may seem most expedient; it is extremely attractive; it promises a large fortune, or it gives me now very great delight: but if it be in the face of God's express prohibition, if all the world should sing and shout its excellency, depend upon it, it is the worst possible expediency you can pursue. No practice or advice of others,

no seeming advantage that the future projects into the present, no present delight felt from the course that you are now pursuing, ever ought to weigh one single atom against an express and unequivocal prohibition — “Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not.” Take with you, then, the governing principle, that not even a master, when he contradicts God, nor the world, nor the priest, nor the crowd, nor any one upon earth, is to be obeyed in opposition to Him who is the only Lawgiver, who alone can make alive, and alone destroy.

Let me advise you to remember that the safe side in youth is always the side of restraint. Remember your passions are strong, your feelings are ardent, your hopes enthusiastic. I should not like to damp or to discourage — that would be wrong; I would rather prefer to regulate, inspire, and guide. Do not forget that the safe side is holding back, and that the perilous side is flinging loose the reins, and letting the passions carry you wherever they will. You are placed upon a great pinnacle; there are around you wind, and storm, and fire, and rain, and all the elements of peril, trial, temptation. You cannot be too guarded, you cannot pause too long before you act. Think twice in every instance before you decide.

In order to be sober-minded, recollect that all human life is a series of causes and effects. Try to carry with you this thought into your counting-houses and shops next week, that there is nothing that you do that ceases and is done with the instant it is accomplished. There is no such thing as *un*

fait accompli. Every sound has an echo, every light has a shadow; every act that you do, every word that you speak, every thought that you think, is a cause prolific in consequences and effects; and if you weigh well this suggestion, you will think twice before you do anything that may cause results likely to be launched beyond your reach, and which no human power can arrest. Where two courses are before you, and both seem equally beneficent and good, and you ask, "Which am I to choose?" take the one, if you like, that is most profitable or pleasant, if both be equally right; but never forget this inquiry—Which of them is purest, and will have the best issues? Which of the twain will bear the best fruit? What will be the consequence of this? and what is likely to be the consequence of that? Having thus seen, as far as your sagacity, guided by the experience of the good, and the instructions of the Bible, can pierce, which seems best and most expedient, adopt it: for expediency is a Christian virtue; and where there are two things equally good, you may take the one that appears more expedient. Expediency is only bad when it is set up against principle; but its exercise is most proper when, both courses being good, you apply it to determine which is the one that you will adopt.

And let me remind you that soberness of mind never can be adjourned to old age. The young say, "Oh! let us have our way. The crow's-feet will soon appear at our eyes, and the grey hairs on our head. Let us have some enjoyment now. It will be time enough to think about these things at thirty,

forty, fifty, or sixty." Age is very much the creation of youth. Soberness in youth is the secret of the beautiful and quiet, and sometimes brilliant sunset of old age. Habit becomes a second nature, and when once contracted, it lasts through life. It is the excesses of youth that explain the decrepitude of old age. Let the volcano burn and explode at twenty, and at sixty there will be the cold and worthless lava—all that is left behind. If you are spared to old age, you will then discover that soberness in youth is the best way to prepare for it. The greatest guarantee that old age will not be sorrow and heaviness of heart, is saving now, and laying up health for days that are yet to come. You find the same thing applied to money matters. People do not spend all their money when they have got it; but many prudently, and some avariciously, lay by now that they may be rich in old age. Take this principle into a higher department. Lay up a capital of health, good conduct, piety, principle, till old age; and when threescore and ten come, you can draw upon the capital laid up in youth, and your old age will not be mere existence, but life—and that life a joyous, happy, and beautiful one.

Seek first, in all your ways, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be added unto you. This is the prescription for making the best of both worlds. You remember the remark made by the illustrious Duke of Wellington, when some one said that a Frenchman had noticed that the word "glory" never occurred in his despatches:—"How foolish must that man be not to see that

if I wished to get the richest harvest of glory, the way to do it was to do my duty!" Now, if you want to get the best of this world, set your heart supremely on the next; if you want to gain this world as an addition, set your heart firmly upon the world that is to come. Walk with your eyes fixed upon the lights of the everlasting home, and your feet will not stumble. Do not make religion the exclusive thing, but the guiding and the main thing. We do not ask you to cease to study literature, science, music, or anything in this world that would make you useful. We do not ask you to cease to be tradesmen, lawyers, physicians, or whatever be the business or profession you follow. These things you ought to do. If a man will not work, he ought to be treated as all the monks of Christendom ought—he should not eat. What we ask of you to do is, to govern yourselves by the supreme thing, seeking first the kingdom of God. For instance, if you change your house, let this be one main consideration, "Shall I have the opportunity of attending where the Gospel is preached?" In going to a place of worship, do not make this the first question, "Have they a liturgy, or an organ? Is it episcopal, presbyterial, or congregational?" but make this the first question, "Is the Gospel faithfully preached there? Are the truths that do men good set forth there?" I do not ask you to give up your preferences; but rather to take a church where your souls will be nourished with living food, whose forms you may not like, than a church that deals out poison, not bread, though it has the most beautiful forms

and services such as your taste prefers. So, again, if any of you young men are to be employed in a house of business, select the house that will give you in the week-day the most time for reading; and I do regret that there is so little of that time allowed now. The demand for the encroachment on the Sabbath is the natural rebound of the exciting conduct of employers on the week-day. And if you are taking a situation, do not go to one where you can have no Sabbath; but select that house of business where there will be the fear of God; where the master will not speak religion—that is not necessary—but where he will act it; and where you will have opportunities of hearing God's Word, and of going where your minds can be edified, instructed, and built up once a week, if possible, on the week-day, but always all the Sunday, without limitation of any sort. Prefer a little less salary (it is hard advice to give, but it is sound), where you will have a little more privilege; and remember that if you will only honour God by giving up a little of this world's good for his sake, God will honour you, when that honour will be most needed. Seek first God's kingdom, and his righteousness; and all other things will be added unto you. And our blessed Lord himself tells us, "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Study daily that great and infallible Directory, God's Holy Word. "Wherewithal shall a young

man cleanse his way?" The answer is, "By taking heed thereto according to thy Word." We often battle with the victims of the Church of Rome, and contend that the Bible is the only rule of faith; but hundreds of thousands of Protestants take the Bible as the rule of faith, who do not take the Bible as a rule of life, which it equally is. The Bible is not only the rule of faith, by which we determine what is true, but the rule of life, from which we receive regulations as to what is dutiful and correct. And, therefore, when a young man wants to cleanse his way, let him study that blessed Book. Avail yourselves of Commentaries, and of parallel passages; and if you have any spare time, I would advise a young man to acquire a little knowledge of the Greek tongue, and he will be delighted with the stores of suggestive and precious thought which reading God's Word in the tongue in which it was inspired and written, will bring to him. It is true, every one has not the time; but, if you have nothing very urgent after your day-toils are over, learn a little of the secrets of the original tongue in which this blessed Book was written. Above all, pray that the Spirit of God would teach you. Remember, you are not to read the Bible according to the explanations of any Commentary, as if they were infallible; nor are you to read it according to the interpretations of any priest. We must neither be Mammon-ridden, nor priest-ridden, nor press-ridden. Read the Bible in its own light, availing yourselves of every useful Commentary and means of casting light upon it; and you will find written there how a young man is to purify his way.

I would advise, in the next place, constant and conscientious attendance on the worship of God. Many young men, and especially those who have come from my own country, attend the church in which I minister of an evening; so many that a Frenchman who came into that church on a Sunday evening, said that what most struck him was the vast preponderance of young men in the congregation. When you go into a Roman Catholic church on the continent, the only worshippers are females; and therefore he was surprised to see so many men within these walls hearing the Gospel; and it made him *feel* that there must be reason on the side of Protestantism, or else men, as he called them, would not be auditors of it. Never give up being hearers of the Word of God. You may hear what you will often forget, but you will also hear what you will often recollect. You there join in public prayer, and you will be within the reach of good. Do not give up the sanctuary for the Crystal Palace. I do not at all believe that truly Christian men would give up the one for the other; but I am sure that if young men were to do so, whilst they would come into contact with God's creatures, which is most instructive, they would forget what is vitally important—that this is a remedical dispensation, that the sanctuary is the ward of an hospital, and that we are not unfallen men. We may see God in his works; but we need more than this: we are morally diseased, and we need to come into the hospital to be treated accordingly. And if you assume that you are well, and study only God's

works, and forget that you are ill, and so need a revelation — if you are so charmed with creation that you lose all recollection of redemption, it never can be well with you here or hereafter.

Let me ask all young men to decide, at the commencement of each new year, that the next year shall be lived on a higher level; that increasingly you will set God before you, and in all your ways acknowledge him; that you will seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, that all other things may be added. Let the beautiful spring-time pass, which is yours, and your harvest will have no golden sheaves. In this spring-season sow the seeds of sin, and you have no idea how disastrous a harvest of reaping in tears you are preparing for yourselves. Do not forget that you may never see old age. It is too true that owing to the grinding toil, the thoughts, and anxieties, and drudgery of a great city, vast proportions of our young men are carried off to a premature grave. You need not be told that half the human race dies before seven years of age, a quarter dies before forty, a very considerable portion before sixty, and that it is only straggling individuals who attain seventy, one or two it may be eighty, and scarcely any a hundred years of age. Knowing, therefore, that with a single year a large slice of life's capital is cut off, turn the rest to instant and to nobler good, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

I pray that God may imprint these truths upon your hearts. Never forget that in learning the things of this world, however interesting, there is a

wisdom that with all your getting you ought instantly to get — the knowledge of God, and of his Son, Christ Jesus, which is everlasting life.

“We have not wings, we cannot soar;
But we have feet to scale and climb,
By slow degrees — by more and more,
The cloudy summits of our time.

“The mighty pyramids of stone,
That wedge-like cleave the desert airs,
When nearer seen and better known,
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.

The distant mountains that uprear
Their frowning foreheads to the skies,
Are crossed by pathways that appear
As we to higher levels rise.

“The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

“Standing on what too long we bore,
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern, unseen before,
A path to higher destinies.

“Nor deem the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain —
If rising on its wreck at last,
To something nobler we attain.”

THE END.



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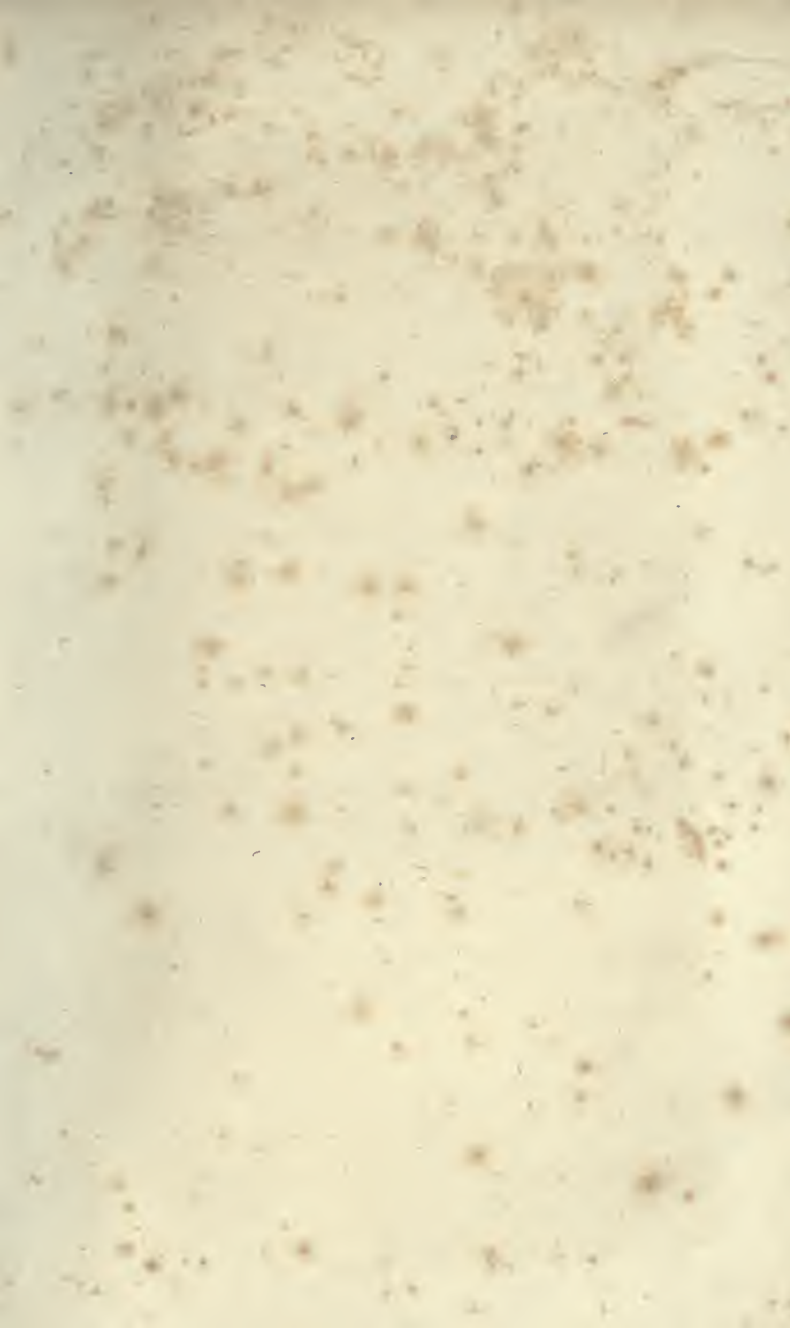
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